

THIS IS HOW WE DO: LIVING AND LEARNING IN AN APPALACHIAN EXPERIMENTAL
MUSIC SCENE

A Thesis
by
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ABSTRACT

THIS IS HOW WE DO: LIVING AND LEARNING IN AN APPALACHIAN EXPERIMENTAL MUSIC SCENE (2011)

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At the grassroots, Appalachian music encompasses much more than traditional music genres, like old-time and bluegrass. While these prevailing musics continue to inform most popular and scholarly understandings of the region's musical heritage, many contemporary scholars dismiss such narrow definitions of "Appalachian music" as exclusionary and inaccurate. Many researchers have, thus, sought to broaden current understandings of Appalachia's diverse contemporary and historical cultural landscape as well as explore connections between Appalachian and other regional, national, and global cultural phenomena.

In April 2009, I began participant observation and interviewing in an experimental music scene unfolding in downtown Boone, North Carolina. This ethnographic material extrapolates on largely unexplored connections between Appalachian Studies and an international music underground similarly dissonant with "mainstream" American cultural understandings and projects. Because I am a musical performer in this scene, I also incorporate autoethnographic reflections of my own embodied activities and experiences. In contextualizing my observations and conclusions about the culture of this "non-Appalachian, Appalachian" music scene, I trace Appalachian identity through the history of

American indie music before exploring this history's intersections with Boone's local history of alternative music scenes.

I began my field work under the assumption that participants were engaged in constructing some unified, collective identity. After a time in the field, however, this initial focus seemed to simplify the complex social processes underway within this small but diverse music scene. No one identity or agreed upon culture existed between all participants. Instead, what they held in common proved far more interesting: a commitment to learning about and through various, sometimes opposed historically-contingent socio-cultural fields—or figured worlds—of alternative music. My research question necessarily shifted to accommodate such a realization. This thesis, then, explores this central question: How does learning happen in a local experimental music scene collectively engaged in negotiating and remaking disparate alternative music worlds?

DEDICATION

For

All seekers of the couer-rage to create.

“Music is a plane of wisdom, because music is a universal language. It is a language of honor, it is a noble precept, a gift of the Airy Kingdom. Music is air, a universal existence. . . common to all the living.” – Sun Ra, “Music: The Neglected Plane of Wisdom,” 1955

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My return to school and, therefore, this thesis would have been impossible without two years of Chancellor's Fellowship support from the Cratis D. Williams Graduate School. The Center for Appalachian Studies provided much appreciated research funding through the Carl A. Ross Appalachian Studies Memorial Scholarship and the William C. Friday Research Fellowship. Several

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INTRODUCTION

Appalachian Stepchild Redux

“Stop the car!” Going north on Highway 221, a winding, two-lane road ascending into North Carolina's Blue Ridge, our printed MapQuest directions told me we were somewhere past Linville, North Carolina. With our destination, the town of Boone, only thirty miles away, I freaked out. A combination of sleep deprivation and the unfamiliar feeling of careening down a skinny highway with our vehicle sandwiched between jagged walls of rock, to the right, and the whoosh of semis and logging trucks barreling past us, to the left, I needed a time-out. Low on gas and unsure about whether to turn left or right at this fork in the road, Michael pulled into what turned out to be an abandoned gas station/convenience store which has since been repainted and renamed Hillbilly Marketplace.

Finally out of the car, we sat outside the abandoned building and watched the sun rise. I needed to be still and silent, to feel my feet upon solid ground and to finally see the mountains I had felt beginning to envelop me as we drove deeper into what then seemed a completely other country. The barrage of questions and self-doubt that plagued me during that pre-dawn car-ride could have exploded right there. Instead, as I looked over that brightening spring valley and the breathtaking beauty of our first mountain morning sky, calm overcame me. What were we doing here so far from home? Why had Appalachian State University (ASU) so generously offered me the tuition-free opportunity to study at their institution? What could I, who had never been farther into the mountains than Cabbage Patch BabyLand General Hospital, ever have to say about Appalachia or Appalachian Studies? Who would care to listen? These questions didn't disappear, but at this intense emotional crossroads, I let go. Realizing that none of these questions had quick or easy answers, I accepted that we were taking a leap of faith. I decided to believe that some sort of underlying logic, some as yet

undiscovered reason had carried me to that moment, to this place. I would go with the flow and see what I could discover. Scary as it seemed, I knew I had no other choice. I accepted the summons.

I have told this story many times to friends and fellow graduate students because it has become part of my being and the personal mythology through which I continue to better understand who I am in this place and my trajectory in the world. I still revisit that morning in my mind: the anxiousness of arriving in a place where not a single person knew our names, my initial unfavorable impression of downtown Boone's touristy flavor and smallness, as well as my disappointment at how "like everywhere else" the rest of the town seemed. I usually leave out this epilogue in my retellings, but I reveal these details now as part of my own reflexive realization that on that spring morning in 2009, we were on the run, trying to escape an alienation and rootlessness we did not have the words to explain or the means to understand. Disillusioned with our relatively comfortable lives in a suburban middle Georgia town we felt could no longer contain our dreams or appreciate the gifts we had to share, my husband and I packed our few belongings and set out in search of a people and a place where we might better belong.

As it turned out, Boone was not so different from the places we came from. We did marvel at the capricious weather, the droves of wealthy tourists and summer people, and how one could busk on King Street without being bothered by the police or receiving too many sidelong glances. But, after hearing "Free Bird" on three separate occasions during our first week of lingering downtown and noticing the Allman Brothers posters so prominently displayed in the mini-mall windows, it felt a little more like home. Let there be no doubt, though, Boone was different. Michael and I began to sense this before we rolled into town when, on that fateful May morning, we finally found an operational gas station and bought a Town of Boone map.

"Boone-town, eh?" the station attendant muttered distastefully. I expected he might say more, something about the dirty hippies or the liberal heathens. He eyed us pretty good, alright, but said nothing more. He rang us up and sent us back on our way. Maybe it was my imagination, my own

stereotypical expectations informed by the common reactions we had already received from family and friends. “Oooh, Happy Appy!” Wink, wink. Well, that was more tolerable than “Appa-laaay-chia, why the heck do you wanna go there?!” Either way, the way those words fell from his lips felt familiar. They seemed to imply we were up to no good or headed for some hotbed of sin, which I took as a comforting sign we were on the right track, after all. My perception of Boone’s special situation came into further focus over time and as we met so many different types of people concerned about the same things we were: culture and sustainability and the pursuit of purposeful lives.

This autobiographical anecdote contains much more than personal significance. The stories of many overlapping cultural worlds appear alongside the thematic streams of identity, creativity, sustainability, and learning how to improvise meaningful lives in a constantly changing, always uncertain modern world. These provide the complex backdrop for the following ethnography of Boone’s experimental music scene. The idea for this thesis, of course, did not begin in that first car-ride through the mountains. Like most stories, this bigger picture contains more starting points and excursions than I could ever know or tell. In the interest of self-disclosure, however, I will illuminate some of the pertinent circumstances and significant events that have influenced, as well as biased, my exploration of learning in a local, somewhat hidden, Appalachian music scene.

While music grabbed me from a young age, I did not grow up in a family engaged in creating or playing much music. Some misguided, though well-intentioned, adults led me to believe that these unfortunate circumstances precluded my possessing some non-existent thing called “musical talent” or ever developing the ability to play music. Because my early exposure to music consisted of a combination of Top 40 FM radio and, in my teenage years, a steady diet of MTV, nothing I heard or saw led me to believe otherwise. Musicians were beautiful, distant magicians, communicators of a language that moved and mystified me. Only in high school, after I befriended a boy who had already cultivated a wealth of musical ability and experience, did musicians and the possibility of my making

music become a reality. Through him, I finally learned that many worlds of music existed beyond “the mainstream,” some right under my nose.

My real involvement with local music scenes began in 2003 when I arrived in Athens, Georgia, a freshman at the University of Georgia (UGA). I quickly seized the opportunity to DJ and review music for the student-run, campus radio station, WUOG. I took advantage of show passes to downtown venues, like the 40 Watt and the Caledonia, featuring various touring indie music acts. From the sidelines, I supported friends who enthusiastically formed bands and played shows around town. Because academics took precedence over partying and my love for minimalist composition and improvised drones baffled most of my fellow WUOGers, I remained an observant, though marginal, participant in the Athens scene during my undergraduate years.

It was only after I graduated from UGA and moved to Macon, Georgia, in 2007, that I began engaging in sound rituals with the boy from high school, Michael. Sometimes we would play acoustic, percussive jams and chant. When we could get away with it we plugged in our electric guitar and bass and created a “sea of sound”—my favorite game. Empowered by and enamored with the sounds I could create, I remained relatively free of concerns about whether or not I was making anything anyone would call “good” or, even, “music.” This self-consciousness only came later when these private rituals and home recordings became public performances involving other people—audiences of listeners including other musicians, with expectations. In a dark spell of unemployed boredom, I realized I heard melodies and lyrics in my head. Slowly, I learned how to participate in the once mysterious act of music making and found myself cultivating a musical identity.

Fortunately for me, I found a nurturing artistic community in which I could learn in collaboration with similarly open-minded others. On crooked Cotton Avenue, in the heart of Macon's otherwise logically gridded, architecturally beautiful, and largely abandoned downtown district, the Golden Bough Bookstore existed as a downtown space where “anything goes.” In the summer of 2007, the owner of this antiquarian bookstore began hosting musical events every Tuesday night.

Michael and I played the second and many subsequent Tuesday nights, testing out ideas, making new friends, and forging many musical partnerships that continue to inform our practice. From the back room of this one downtown store, an eclectic and vibrant underground music scene grew up in partial opposition to the deeply entrenched Southern rock, blues, and jam band scenes.

My initial experiences creating musical community came from my observation and participation within this particular scene, which I mention for two reasons. First, I have asked many of my informants to draw on their own musical experiences and trajectories in other scenes in order to bring us closer to what makes Boone's experimental music scene both different from and similar to like scenes unfolding in other places. Many of the boundaries and tensions I will illuminate in the past and current Boone scenes are similar to those that exist elsewhere; and, I will draw on my own experiences in making these more explicit. The Appalachian music scene explored in these pages is by no means unique. Though different from other scenes across the country and the world, Boone's experimental scene represents one node in an international grassroots music network. Second, Macon has indelibly influenced my musical identity and many Maconites remain a vital part of my extended musical network (though that seems a rather inadequate and sociological way to describe the deep affinity, if not kinship, I feel for many of these individuals). Especially because of the prominent roles my husband and I seem to have unwittingly assumed within Boone's small scene, an amount of self-disclosure seems only appropriate. In addition, Macon friends, like Clark Bush, Willie D., with Adrian Orange, and Cult of Riggonia, have consciously attempted to forge Boone-Macon connections that may affect how the Boone scene conceptualizes itself and where Boone bands may stop on their own future tours through the Southeast. At the time of this writing, Boone's most established experimental band, Naked Gods, are passing through Macon on a three-week-long spring 2011 tour on their way to Austin's annual South by Southwest (SXSW) indie music and film festival.

While I will reveal relevant personal details where I feel they will help extrapolate on certain cultural observations and conclusions, this story ultimately attempts to connect the stories of many

others—individuals and groups—with similarities and differences. I have always felt like something of an outsider in every unit of social organization I have participated in. Much as I, like many people, desire to participate in community and to feel communion with others, my anxious, personal experiences with and internalized perceptions of human differences still often overwhelm my efforts toward collaborative practice. My involvement in a “non-Appalachian, Appalachian” music scene made me self-conscious about my legitimacy as an Appalachian studies scholar and teacher. Much as I love this region and feel a belonging with my graduate cohort, my mixed ethnicity and past experiences would not allow me to escape my outsider status and self-perception. Over the past couple years, much of my journey involved listening to the stories of others who, like me, have struggled to move beyond strict insider/outsider ways of thinking about regional and personal identity, recognizing those diverse experiences relevant to the future trajectory and persistence of Appalachian Studies.

Likewise, I have yet to find a musical community in which I feel my tastes and contributions are fully appreciated or understood. While many think of me as a “musician,” I still have difficulty embracing such an identity. I see my role as more of a “musical explorer” than a “musician.” Perhaps I retain a dislike for the exclusive and professional tinge the word still conjures up in my mind. To this day, I consider myself first and foremost a writer and must balance the demands that both music and writing make on my time. While musicians and writers operate within the same magical realm of feelings and ideas, I spend most of my time attempting to communicate these through words. But, for me, music and words do go hand in hand. Putting on a record eases the difficulty of writing by keeping me unselfconscious enough to keep the words flowing. In figuring out melodies on the guitar, I often sing a melody and make the guitar sing back to me, while, in writing songs, I have never ceased to wonder at how words can simply emerge from two alternating chords. Furthermore, I know of no better tool than language to get at the underlying motivations, intentions, and processes behind musical performance and learning. Various forms of peripheral participation and observation possess

untold potential for creating marginal wisdoms and revealing that which cannot be seen or understood from the center. Such an understanding represents a main theme of this project.

This thesis will focus on the experiences and stories of participants in a local music scene situated within the Appalachian region. While “traditional” elements appear to varying degrees, the musicians featured herein play various musics that would not usually be thought of as “Appalachian.” Many of these artists, however, actively experiment with music in ways that consciously play with the questions Appalachian scholars are still trying to figure out: What is “Appalachian”? How does one participate in culture in a way that is sensitive to place? Music's ability to defy boundaries has always intrigued me. As the “mother” of the arts, I often think of music as the closest thing humans have to a universal language. Certainly music means different things to different people in different places and times, but it works with the raw material of feelings in ways that defy easy understanding and break down boundaries wherever they are found. The medium seems to possess enormous cross-cultural communicative ability and guides many to a common ground of shared humanity.

Nurturing the ideas that inspired this research and finally believing in them enough to carry it out was, like any worthwhile endeavor, a long journey of many false starts, seemingly unrelated detours, and lots of flying blind. A pivotal turning point in the germination of this project, however, occurred a little over a year after arriving in Boone. One Friday evening in June of 2010, I sat on the Jones House lawn, in downtown Boone, for one of the community center's summer concerts. A band composed of Appalachian State University professors and other transplants to the region played the gypsy jazz tunes of guitarist Django Reinhardt and violinist Stephane Grappelli. My perception of the bands' disturbing lack of contextual explanation and de-emphasis of the improvisatory nature at the heart of this music aside, several other things struck me. Though a full-time resident of downtown Boone for over a year, I felt like an outsider here. Aside from a few people I knew through my Appalachian Studies network, none of the people who I saw living and working downtown were here. I am sure that some local community members were in attendance, but for the most part this cultural

performance seemed a Town and University collaboration orchestrated for an ASU and tourist population. This personal impression led to an internal objection and line of inquiry that developed into this research.

Why was this music deemed appropriately Appalachian (clearly neither Reinhardt nor Grappelli hailed from anywhere near Appalachia) and in keeping with popular ideas of Appalachian-ness? Why were these supposedly traditional or folk performances fit for public consumption and given more support and visibility than the poorly attended record store shows just across the street? In my mind, those shows seemed to more closely fit a conception of authentic “folk” performance as non-commercial, intimate gatherings of friends and other performers learning and experimenting in making music with whatever equipment and instruments could be scrounged up for the occasion.

A couple months earlier, in April, 641 rpm hosted a three-night noise/drone Attention Deficit Destruction (A.D.D.) festival of musical acts from all over the surrounding area. On the third night people banged their heads and politely slammed their bodies to some Harrisonburg, Virginia noise-punks, Buck Gooter. Though self-conscious about my inability to move my own body and contribute to energy in the room, the band’s thrashing singer reassured me with the most tender caress my earlobe has ever received. Vire & Keese, a side project of former Boonenite Human Pippi Armstrong, repeatedly shouted the infamous “Squeal like a pig” *Deliverance* reference that still makes many Appalachian Studies scholars shudder. This specific performance detail, combined with the abrasive, electronic tones that accompanied it, seemed to communicate something about the region. Looking back, I believe this is where I really started to contemplate the connections between the local experimental music scene and “Appalachian” culture and music. Through this thesis I attempt to make unexplored connections between Appalachian Studies and an American music underground similarly dissonant with “mainstream” American values and projects.

Because no single collective identity unifies this scene, I emphasize the process of creative learning—in all its cooperation and competition. Chapter one will review the anthropological

literature I consulted to understand the complex and dynamic processes involved in learning within communities of practice to negotiate specific cultural domains—like the domain of alternative music upon which this present work focuses. Chapter two will delve into the methodological processes and concerns guiding this research. In chapter three, I will paint an historical overview of Appalachian identity within American indie music. Chapter four will engage with the specific history of Boone, North Carolina’s alternative music scenes since the early 1980s. This chapter will be followed by an analysis of learning in Boone's current experimental scene, including contemporary local and global influences on this social process. Finally we will conclude with some reflections on the state of experimental music in the early twenty-first century and the implications these have for learning and pursuing relevant cultural projects within the scattered, ever-shifting worlds of alternative music.

CHAPTER ONE

Communities of Practice in Figured Worlds: A Review of the Literature

In the early stages of my research on Boone's experimental music scene, I thought participants were engaged in constructing some unified, collective identity. After a time in the field, this initial focus seemed only to simplify the complex social processes underway within this small, but diverse, music scene. No single identity or agreed upon culture existed between all participants. Instead, what they held in common proved far more interesting: a commitment to learning about and through various, sometimes opposed, historically-contingent sociocultural fields—or figured worlds—of alternative music. The way participants perceived these figured worlds as meaningful to their own practices, however, varied significantly from individual to individual, sometimes even within the same band—the social unit I designate as a community of practice—based on differences in situated experience. Here, I will retrace my own trajectory through the anthropological literature I found most useful in exploring this central question: How does learning happen in an Appalachian experimental music scene collectively engaged in negotiating and remaking disparate alternative music worlds?

From identity to practice

Over the past thirty years, anthropology has dealt some serious blows to any persisting notions of identity as either a stable or singular entity. The disciplinary mission to understand human cultures traditionally emphasized cultural identity and what individuals in identifiable social groups shared in common, rather than their differences. The shift away from this emphasis began with some mid-twentieth century reflection about anthropology's unconscious colonialist motivations and dehumanizing of subjects. Sokēfeld (1999) noted that

anthropological characterizations of “the other” are often inversions of European self-images ... unbounded, not integrated, dependent, unable to set itself reflexively apart from others, unable to distinguish between the individual and a role or status that individual occupies, unable to pursue its own goals independently of the goals of the group or community. (p. 418)

Early twentieth century theory tended to constrain possibilities for conscious and creative action by presenting cultural structures as benign entities molding subjects into stable identities corresponding to necessary and clear-cut social purposes. By mid-century, three simultaneously emerging schools of thought sought to move beyond structural-functionalist theories that positioned subjects as passive consumers and unconscious reproducers of simplistic, fairly static cultures.

The symbolic-interpretive school, led by Clifford Geertz, emphasized meaning and the multiple, diverse interpretations individuals often bring to the same set of symbols within specific cultural domains. From within the Marxist political economy camp, anthropologists focused on issues of domination, labor, and human rights, questioning the neutrality and desirability of upholding unjust social status quos. The French post-structuralism inaugurated by Claude Lévi-Strauss argued that seemingly insignificant cultural artifacts, like myths, played more subterranean, though inescapably powerful roles in shaping social identities. The combined effect of these three breakthroughs in anthropological thinking meant that seemingly bounded categories, like gender and ethnicity, were not as rigid or simple as previously believed (Ortner, 2006).

For example, anthropologist Susan Keefe’s (1992) work on Chicano and Appalachian ethnic identities used a symbolic-interpretive approach to conclude that ethnic identities result from complex processes and individual experiences within the entire

domain of ethnic identity consist[ing] of: the perception of differences between ethnic groups; the feelings of attachment to and pride in one ethnic group and cultural heritage as

opposed to others; and ... the perception of prejudice and discrimination against one's own ethnic group. (p. 38)

Likewise, Martin Sokëfeld's (1999) early research on ethnic identity "forced him to acknowledge the importance of acting individuals" (p. 419); and, current research on gender and sexual identity has reached similar conclusions (Moore, 2007). Rather than any essential "thing," recent discourse has increasingly thought about both "culture" and "identity" as highly contentious internal processes and external performances (Sokëfeld, 1999; Cohen, 1994).

Furthermore, the subject's ability to negotiate meaning and identity as well as pursue action in a complex and always changing world necessarily involved the interrelated processes of *subjectivity* and *agency*. Anthropologist Sherry Ortner (2006) defines subjectivity as "complex structures of thought, feeling and reflection that make social beings always more than the occupants of particular positions and the holders of particular identities" (115). Ortner understood subjectivity to precede agency and borrowed William H. Sewell's definition of agency as the "capacity for desiring, for forming intentions, and for acting creatively ... an ability to coordinate one's actions with others and against others to form collective projects, to persuade, to coerce" (136).

These readings made me self-conscious about seeking to impose a singular, collective identity on the music scene I observed. Inter-scene tensions revealed multiple identifications and the negotiation of diverse, sometimes opposed, meanings, motivations, and intentions. I could not ignore that individuals valued various features of the wide domain of alternative musics and aligned themselves with those who shared similar meanings for leveraging musical projects toward shared cultural goals. Those who experimented in connecting electronically produced sounds to those of nature or emphasized the noises creating the backdrop of everyday life, for example, operated in a very different realm of the alternative music domain than those experimenting with elements of Appalachian folk identity and ideas of collectivity and kinship. Despite such differences, active participants nevertheless demonstrated shared enterprise to create opportunities for less mainstream

music in Boone. The tense boundaries between profit-seeking venue owners and musicians seeking to play more non-commercial, exploratory music further demonstrated the presence of agency in remaking the local structures and opening up spaces for local experimental music practice.

Researchers seeking to build a theoretical foundation emphasizing the long ignored elements of subjectivity and agency increasingly turned their attention to the actions of individuals and groups. In doing so, they developed a new school of thought called *practice theory*. Sherry Ortner, practice theory's most vocal anthropological proponent, located constraining elements within the symbolic-interpretive, Marxist political economic, and French post-structuralist schools. Symbolic-interpretivism often overlooked relationships of power, while Marxist political economists emphasized processes of domination to such an extent that they tended to portray subjects as passive victims or able only to assume reactionary identities of resistance to dominating structures. Lévi-Straussian post-structuralism, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of subterranean social structures, like myth, so much that individual capacity for subjectivity and agency became illusions, always dictated by unconscious, invisible forces. In order to move beyond the constraints of these dominant schools of thought, second generation practice theorists necessarily pieced together inspiring insights found in the works of many social scientists, including Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Anthony Giddens, and Clifford Geertz (Ortner, 2006).

Virtually all practice theorists ground their thinking in Pierre Bourdieu's work and, especially, the concepts developed in his seminal *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (1977), where he focused on the influence of physical and cultural structures on the actions of individuals. He argued that these structures became indelibly imprinted into a subject's consciousness as *permanent dispositions* guiding the way individuals thought about and acted in the world. Bourdieu called the way subjects act in compliance with pre-existing structures *habitus*. Giddens insisted, however, that all subjects possessed some degree of partial knowing as well as the capability of rebelling against inherited structures. Instead of unconsciously reproducing the world, subjects participated in

structuration, the constant remaking or revisioning of structural status quos through specific practices. Giddens, then, sought a middle ground, conceiving of social structures as more malleable than in Bourdieu's habitus, while still conceding the profound influence of structure in enabling and inhibiting agency (Ortner, 2006).

Bringing practice theory back around to the endangered anthropological subject of culture, Ortner relied heavily on Geertz's symbolic-interpretative methods, and especially his classic essay, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," in connecting subjectivity to cultural critique. Not only did Geertz insist upon culture's relevance, he gave human anxiety about potential social chaos a central motivating role in reproducing and revising cultural meanings and systems. Human anxieties and concerns determined the cultural projects subjects pursued and, thus, their critiques of inherited cultural ideas and symbols. In Boone's experimental music scene, for example, many participants studied in ASU's University College and, especially, the increasingly popular Sustainable Development (SD) program. Anxieties about how to achieve a sustainable future motivated the active participation of many in the figured world of alternative music. Likewise, Geertz argued that reprogramming the symbolic structures of cultural worlds could relatively easily change subjective consciousness and agency. Ortner reiterated the importance of recognizing the fluid relationship between structure and agency: "[b]ecause human beings are relatively open creatures, vastly unprogrammed compared to other animals, they literally depend on external symbolic systems—including especially language, but more generally 'culture'—to survive" (p. 119).

All this, Ortner connected to Raymond Williams' critical cultural studies and the cultural logics that, according to Frederic Jameson, increasingly dictate the late modern world (p. 120). Especially in our present Internet Age of continued rapid information globalization, those possessing the creative capacity to participate in cultural critique can more easily manipulate symbolic cultural structures. The further development of interactive Web 2.0 technologies, like social networking sites and wikis, embrace the three characterizing features of late modernity identified by Giddens (1991):

“institutional reflexivity ... the reorganization of time and space, coupled to ... mechanisms which prise social relations free from the hold of specific locales, recombining them across wide time-space dimensions” (p. 2). Cyber ethnographer Hines (2000) remarked on how “localities become disembedded from their cultural, historical, geographic meaning and re-integrated into functional networks, or image collages, inducing a space of flows that substitutes for the space of places” (Hines, 2000, as cited in Waldron, 2009, p. 98). The project of our high modern times involves a critique of those mechanisms that disconnect cultural processes from situated understanding by creating new narrative histories.

For Ortner (2006), a critical practice theory must emphasize historicity—the tracing of practice through time, the location of situations illuminating dynamics of power, and the pursuit of narrative ways of knowing. Many second generation practice theorists, like Marshall Sahlins, William H. Sewell, Jr., and Richard Sennett join Ortner in doing just that. Sahlins retained Bourdieu’s structural emphasis, portraying “real historical actors” navigating the complex flow of historical currents and events. Political historian William H. Sewell, Jr. deemphasized structure and argued that, thanks to the agency of individual actors, unaccounted for and seemingly anomalous events can and do occur all the time (p. 110). Sennett, meanwhile, emphasized narrative and the ability to narrate one’s own life trajectory as tantamount to survival in an insecure, “no long-term” global economy increasingly centered around short-term, creative projects (p. 122).

Communities of Practice

Cognitive anthropologists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger (1991) insisted that all practice involved some form of learning situated within specific forms of social participation (p. 14). Such a formulation allowed for a broad view of learning, taking into account the wide array of practices individuals learn informally, and independent of formal education structures. Furthermore, situated learning did not necessarily imply practice in a shared physically grounded space, but within cultural domains—like alternative music—scattered across spaces and developed through time. In Boone’s

experimental music scene, for example, participants engaged in a geographically situated music scene in and around downtown Boone. Many participants, however, came to Boone with prior experiences in the figured world of alternative music as negotiated in other geographical places as well as in networks of virtual spaces (including books, magazines, the Internet, etc.). At the conclusion of this section, we will more fully discuss figured worlds of cultural production and consumption. First, we investigate how individuals strategically align themselves with others to navigate specific cultural domains.

In *Communities of Practice* (1998), Wenger argued that a complex, process-centered social theory of learning organized relationships between the many theoretical domains practice theorists have long worked to untangle. Such a learning theory unified social science theories of practice, collectivity, social structure, power, identity, subjectivity, situated experience and meaning. Wondering how learning happened in more informal social contexts, Lave and Wenger turned to cross-cultural ethnographies of apprenticeship to understand how individuals became midwives, tailors, quartermasters, butchers, and non-drinking alcoholics. While apprenticeships differed in their degrees of informality, processes of learning, and nature of relations between old-timers and newcomers, they concluded that more informal, non-hierarchical learning occurred in relatively generalizable social formations they dubbed *communities of practice* (CoPs).

Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) most succinctly define CoPs as “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (p. 4). The health of such communities depended on the maintenance of informality, voluntarism, and respect for individual autonomy while cultivating internal leaders. CoPs exist everywhere and often spring up with or without organizational support. By examining their everyday practices, individuals can identify the multiple, sometimes complementary, at times conflicting, CoPs in which they participate and seek belonging. Structurally speaking,

a community of practice is a unique combination of three fundamental elements: a domain of knowledge which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about this domain, and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain. (p. 27)

Wenger's (1998) conceptualization of CoPs embraced multiple types of learning. While practice involved *learning as doing*, all actions are always directed at others. Therefore, actions undertaken by the subject in the pursuit of joining specific perceived communities also entailed *learning as belonging*. In navigating particular domains, communities negotiated identity (*learning as becoming*) and experimented with the meanings of these identities as played out in particular situations and places (*learning as experience*). Wenger defined the four central components of social learning in this way:

Meaning: a way of talking about our (changing) ability – individually and collectively – to experience our life and the world as meaningful.

Practice: a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action.

Community: a way of talking about the social configuration in which our enterprises are defined as worth pursuing and our participation is recognizable as competence.

Identity: a way of talking about how learning changes who we are and creates personal histories of becoming in the context of our communities. (p. 5)

Lave & Wenger (1991) theorized CoPs as evolving, fluid processes (rather than structures) characterized by *legitimate peripheral participation* (LPP). LPP described the trajectories all participants, new and old, followed in establishing and re-establishing themselves as legitimate participants as community meanings and identities changed over time. Part of this trajectory included learning from multiple forms of central and peripheral participation as well as maximizing the number of viewpoints and spaces of participation considered valuable for achieving community goals.

While the goals of various CoPs differ, all CoPs accumulate specialized knowledge through the creation of value, which “accrues in the personal satisfaction of knowing colleagues who understand each other’s perspectives and of belonging to an interesting group of people” (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002, p. 5). Additionally, CoPs may engage in a variety of different activities and strategies including problem solving, requests for information, seeking experience, reusing assets, coordination and synergy, discussing developments, documentation projects, visits, and mapping knowledge and identifying gaps (Wenger, 2006). Through passionate, sustained group engagements toward specific cultural goals, CoPs generate value, including intergroup trust and openness, and become practical units for understanding the social pursuit of knowledge within a specific domain. Valle & Weiss (2010) considered Mexico City graffiti crews as CoPs. Here, I consider bands, rather than an entire music scene, the social level at which CoP dynamics can be observed.

While high levels of cooperation exist within CoPs, so too does competition. Differences of experience (what one knows) and competence (what one can do) determined legitimacy, provoking relative hierarchies and constantly shifting community boundaries. No participant, however experienced or skilled, ever always existed at the center or periphery (Wenger et al., 2002). Even a highly skilled performer playing in a show with three other bands is obliged to sit out, observe, and react to the performances of many others over the course of a single night. Likewise, performers possessing less experience or skill may demonstrate superior abilities in manipulating existing structures (i.e. access to local booking agents or successful promotion via social networking sites) for booking and networking purposes.

Participants, then, move along various *trajectories* of participation through situations in which they have greater or lesser amounts of experience and competence. Because no one always exists “in the know” or “in the center,” all participants must contend with the knowledge presented by many forms of participation and peripheral experience. Lave and Wenger (1991) present peripheral positions as exciting spaces from which learning can take place through increased recognition of

different perspectives, elevated consciousness of community boundaries, and new possibilities for unexplored connections. Furthermore, the perception of one's legitimate versus illegitimate, peripheral versus central, and participant versus nonparticipant status within a CoP depends on how community members perceive the "landscape of community membership" to begin with (p. 31). Therefore, opportunities for negotiating and expanding notions of legitimate participation as well as valuing peripheral voices can strengthen the viability of the community by inviting many types of participation, welcoming multiple perspectives, and encouraging openness and trust. Wenger, McDermott and Snyder (2002) present all these dynamic forces as central to healthy CoP functioning:

Effective communities are not necessarily without conflict. In fact, the stronger a community, the better it is able to handle dissension and make it productive. In good communities strong bonds withstand disagreement, and members can even use conflict as a way to deepen their relationships and their learning. (p. 37)

Etienne Wenger (1998) stated that "learning cannot be designed: it can only be designed for—that is, facilitated or frustrated" (p. 229). Seeking to apply the CoP model to organizational practices, Wenger, McDermott, and Snyder (2002) asked how one might design for *aliveness*. They determined that the most innovative and persistent CoPs will: design for evolution, open a dialogue between inside and outside perspectives, invite different levels of participation, develop both public and private community spaces, focus on value, combine familiarity and excitement, and create a rhythm for the community. CoPs must remain ever vigilant about potential internal disorders, including "the temptation of ownership" (p. 141), cliquishness (p. 145), documentism (p. 147), and the multiple "failure[s] to develop and deepen practice over time, including amnesia, dogmatism, and mediocrity" (p. 148).

In recent years, for example, the Appalachian Studies community has contended with how to avoid cliquishness, continue pursuing important regional projects, and address social justice issues. Appalachian and American Studies scholar Emily Satterwhite (2007) remarked upon the self-

defeating strategy of “basing an Appalachian identity movement upon only those who live an unadulterated rural ‘Appalachian’ way of life... since an ever-decreasing number of people are capable of claiming and organizing based on such an identity” (p. 103). As a result, contemporary Appalachian scholarship has increasingly expanded its boundaries of identity and concern to address modern and historical regional diversities as well as the relatively unexplored global linkages between Appalachia and other regions of the world. Valle & Weiss’s study of Mexico City graffiti crews (2010) noted an organizational inability to move participants along trajectories of deeper engagement. They presented the case of an individual desiring to further develop his painting skills. Thwarted by a lack of internal CoP organization, the individual joined a crew more interested in providing novices with more practical experiences and moving them along trajectories of increasing competence.

Since the early nineties, much of Wenger’s work further developed the CoP concept by focusing on the internal dynamics of CoPs and how organizations might alter their own structures to accommodate passionate practice. Jean Lave’s recent collaborative work with anthropologist Dorothy Holland, on the other hand, articulated ways individuals and communities built identities and meanings through practices intended to enter the historical dialogue of specific cultural domains. While the concept of CoPs, then, focuses more on how individuals learn to relate to each other, the idea of figured worlds facilitates an understanding of how individuals and groups learn to relate to the historical and present negotiations of identity and meaning within particular cultural domains.

Figured Worlds

In *Identity and Agency in Cultural Worlds*, Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner, and Cain (1998) collaborated to

focus on the development of identities and agency specific to practices and activities situated in historically contingent, socially enacted, culturally constructed ‘worlds’: recognized fields or frames of social life, such as romance, mental illness and its treatment, domestic relationships, Alcoholics Anonymous, academia and local politics. (p. 7)

These researchers developed the insights of early practice theorists, like Bourdieu, primarily through the work of two Russian scholars: developmental psychologist Lev Vygotsky and literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. From Vygotsky's *semiotic mediation* they borrowed an understanding of "symbols, particularly cultural symbols learned through social interaction," as tools of agency, which subjects could use to "affect and reorganize experience" and "free themselves from the tyranny of environmental stimuli" (p. 6). Because Vygotsky believed learning to speak the symbolic language of a specific cultural world happened over time, he stressed developmental process. The subject builds the capacity for agency by developing an understanding of how his or her story fits the historical negotiation of identity and meaning in the cultural world he or she sought to act upon. Bakhtin focused on character representation and human expression, or self-in-practice, what he called the *authoring self*. Through a collision of past experiences and the practices and discourses people encounter in the present, this creative self constantly authored new cultural identities and meanings (p. 32).

Anthropologists have long debated the extent to which nature versus culture dictates behavior. Holland and Lave (2002) used the concept of *history in person* to show how cultural histories lived in and worked through individual subjects. Their theoretical lens, however, acknowledged that subjects can, and often do, act inconsistently with these cultural histories. When ambiguous situations arose, subjects frequently improvised around inherited structures, transcended their social conditioning and positions, and opened spaces for alternative ways of doing. This more dialogic model presented historically-contingent cultural worlds as always addressing subjects and vice versa (p. 6). Holland (1998) presented an anecdote from her fieldwork, with Debra Skinner, in rural Nepal, to demonstrate how one subject made do in such an ambiguous situation. In order to speak with the anthropologists on a balcony without breaking local caste-rules prohibiting lower-caste villagers from entering the kitchen of a higher-caste community member, a village woman climbed the outside wall of the house (p. 9-10). The researchers used the anecdote as evidence that

identities are improvised—in the flow of activity within specific social situations—from the cultural resources at hand. Thus persons and, to a lesser extent, groups are caught in the tensions between past histories that have settled in them and the present discourses and images that attract them or somehow impinge upon them (Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner, & Cain, 1998, p. 4).¹

Because artists are often consciously engaged in negotiating the contentious sociocultural boundaries of a given time and place, they present great opportunities for investigating histories in person. One of my consistent musical inspirations, Sun Ra, hailed from Birmingham, Alabama, within the Appalachian region. The city's African American fraternal and sororal organizations and social clubs patronized local and nationally touring black artists, enabling the young Sonny Blount to absorb the sounds and elaborate stage performances of Duke Ellington, Charlie Parker, the Carolina Cotton Pickers, and, perhaps, on one occasion, Bessie Smith. The local structures behind Birmingham's vibrant musical life made it possible, inevitable, perhaps, that an individual as captivated by music as Sonny would begin playing local nightclubs and social clubs as a member, and eventual bandleader, of various black orchestras. Sonny's transformation into Sun Ra, however, and his trajectory in the figured world of music could not have been entirely predicted by any local or global historical/cultural structures. Sonny read voraciously and keenly felt the racial inequalities he witnessed in pre- and post-World War II, segregated Birmingham. Through music and books, he delved into many figured worlds of history and myth to create his own world—one of social harmony and imaginational improvisation. Combining his knowledge and wit with his multiple experiences of marginalization in the world, Sun Ra created a new name and a new story, a personal mythology explaining his seemingly anomalous presence and purpose in the world. Sun Ra and his orchestras

¹ This dialogic view of subjectivity and agency also borrowed much from Michael Holquist's *dialogism* and A.N. Leontiev, a student of Vygotsky's, who developed an *activity theory*. Similar to Bourdieu's practice theory, activity theory emphasized specific actions as existing in the *flow* between inherited structures and subjective agency, giving precedence to neither (Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner, & Cain 1998, 39).

actively sought to rearrange consciousness through combinations of otherworldly images, sounds, and words (Szwed, 1997).

While individual and collective performances, like Sun Ra's life and musical career, consciously revise the symbolic structures of specific figured worlds, unconscious revisions, like the improvised action of the woman climbing up the wall, happen all the time. Focusing on the dialogic nature of structure and agency moved beyond the retained structuralism of Bourdieu and the constraints *habitus* placed on the capacity for everyday creative action. Part of developing practice in any cultural world involves learning to see the highly malleable aspects of cultural structures and realizing one's own capacity for meaningful action. For this reason, sociologist and network theorist Manuel Castells preferred the metaphor of *re-programming* for emphasizing participant actions in highly alterable cultural landscapes. Understanding culture as programmable symbolic scripts, participants can cultivate a consciousness about the significance of one's actions and the re-programmability of cultural worlds, exactly what CoPs facilitate.

Though Castells studies information globalization and how microelectronic communication technologies continue to restructure late modern sociocultural dynamics into worldwide communications networks, *all figured worlds occupy a virtual space*. Figured worlds do interject themselves into physical spaces, but they exist, more accurately, as collections of symbols independent of the embodied creative process which initially produced it. At the point creative performance enters the virtual world as disembodied artifact, a dislocation of time and space opens up. As musicologist Christopher Small (1984) put it:

Music is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do. The apparent thing "music" is a figment, an abstraction of the action, whose reality vanishes as soon as we examine it at all closely. This habit of thinking in abstraction, of taking from an action what

appears to be its essence and giving that essence a name is probably old as language; it is useful in the conceptualizing of the world but it has its dangers.² (p. 2)

When audiences consume a creative product half-way around the world or, even fifty years after its creation, decontextualization occurs, opening up possibilities for multiple interpretations of meaning and intention. Through situated engagement, however, subjects learn to read artifacts as the most visible remnant of a historically-situated creative process. They cultivate an ability to interpret the underlying identities and meanings encoded in artifacts of performance.

While figured worlds present virtual spaces in which domain-specific artifacts, codes, and symbols circulate, these virtual worlds also inject themselves into geographically situated places. Numerous, overlapping figured worlds present a backdrop against which subjects conduct everyday activities. In Boone, the figured world of academia inserts itself onto the local cultural and physical landscape via Appalachian State University, just as downtown Boone's two independent record stores present obvious local manifestations of the global domain of alternative music. These physical aspects of particular figured worlds present obvious enabling opportunities for cultivating geographically-situated practice within their corresponding domains. Even where collective enterprise in a specific cultural domain exists, however, participants practice in different ways based on personal identifications and meanings. *How* one practices not only matters, it marks competitive boundaries and tensions within the figured world subjects seek to act upon.

While CoPs could also emerge in virtual spaces, like in Waldron's (2009) study of online old-time music communities, internal CoP dynamics entail more cooperation than interactions within figured worlds because their members already possess shared understandings and cultural goals.³ In

² Small (1984) used the term *musicking* to describe the spectrum of activities participants engaged in to make music.

³ Waldron (2009) did note, however, that even this virtual community involved offline, embodied engagements, such as attending festivals and other gatherings of old-time musicians. Many online members of

their own crews, Mexico City graffiti artists not only created, but also read and commented upon the meanings of messages left on the sides of buildings as part of their local figured world of graffiti. These CoPs judged the meaning and skill of graffiti left behind by opposing CoPs. If the graffiti in question seemed lacking, members of an opposing crew might “step on,” or paint over the offending artifact with a more meaningful or skillful piece of work (Valle & Weiss, 2010). Elaborate rules dictated this game, however; and, each figured world possesses its own hierarchies and ways of doing which novices must learn.

The different identifications and meanings that CoPs find in figured worlds are important to understand because they not only inform how one practices, but where community boundaries emerge and relative hierarchies of legitimate participation become negotiated. CoP participation entails some knowledge of why community boundaries exist and why certain performances become valued above others. Waldron’s (2009) study of a virtual old-time music CoP showed unfavorable member responses to a newcomer’s conflation of bluegrass and old-time music, for example. For experienced community members, this poster’s faux pas indicated more than a mere linguistic mistake. It implied an ignorance of the boundaries this particular old-time community drew in distinguishing itself from bluegrass within the figured world of traditional American music. Without such an understanding behind his or her consumption and practice of old-time, the poster lacked CoP acknowledgment as a legitimate participant.

In the case of my present research, participants and CoPs competitively negotiated identity and meaning by engaging with the symbolic sociocultural performances (sound recordings, magazines, books, blogs, festivals, etc.) of certain alternative music worlds (most easily thought of as genres or aesthetic descriptors, like “indie-folk,” “hip-hop” or “punk”). Which alternative music world a participant found most meaningful and, thus, identified with depended on past and present

old-time message boards participated in such events as a means through which the old-time community built trust.

experiences. All this determined how one perceived the legitimacy and authenticity of performance displayed by others. Participants tended to align themselves, in CoPs, with those sharing similar experiences and understandings. Individuals and CoPs engaged in more “progressive” musical forms, for example, may value compositional complexity, technical skill, and disciplined practice whereas someone from a more punk background might prefer a more stripped down and spontaneous performance aesthetic.

While inter-scene competition also exists, experimental scene participants upheld more rigid boundaries between themselves and Boone’s more prominent old-time and jam band scenes. Many see the former as nostalgic, elitist, and constraining of individual creativity, while the latter is often perceived as non-serious, non-situated musical dabbling, the music made by college kids everywhere for partying and taking drugs. Whether one chooses to look at inter-scene or intra-scene contentious boundaries, situated experience always determines how participants approach and interpret the figured world of music.

Boundaries and meanings, though, change over time as situated experiences are brought to bear on the ongoing negotiations between local and global worlds of alternative culture and music. Many fans of contemporary indie rock’s roots music aspects find meaning in the domain’s current negotiation of place and rediscovery of “Appalachian” and “traditional” American music genres. It will be interesting to see whether increasing recognition of presently under-appreciated Appalachian musicians, like Sun Ra, “non-Appalachian, Appalachian” urban music scenes, and the presence of such events as Asheville’s annual Moogfest will expand future understandings of “Appalachian music.”⁴ Either way, negotiation happens over time and through the competitive interactions of many

⁴ Asheville, NC’s annual MoogFest has grown from a small tribute to founder Robert “Bob” Moog into a massive international summit of forward-thinking electronic music experimentalists. Moog Music is now headquartered in Asheville, where Moog taught music technology at UNC-Asheville until his death in 2005. Significantly, Sun Ra, an early synth enthusiast and friend of Bob Moog, was one of the first recipients and users of the legendary MiniMoog, the first portable modular synthesizer.

individuals and, more often, CoPs, over the histories, meanings, and understandings deemed relevant to the present and future of any cultural world.

Consumption and Improvisation as Everyday Practice

Michel de Certeau (1998) argued that creative participation in any cultural world depended on the subject's patterns of active consumption and how well he or she leveraged such consumption toward creative production. Certeau suggested revising assumptions that equate consumption with passive consumerism, by allowing room for the possibility of productive or creative consumption. The practices of cultural producers, like artists, professors, writers, musicians, collectors, etc., clearly indicate that many individuals consume cultural artifacts to fuel creative participation in their specific cultural worlds. Mexican graffiti artists engaged in active and deep consumption of the artifacts of their world—namely, the graffiti of fellow artists—in order to determine its value and develop the crew's own understandings, aesthetic, and prestige (Valle & Weiss, 2010). Even for non-producing participants of cultural worlds, legitimate participation often involves active consumption. In Snell & Hodgett's (2007) study of a CoP centered on the musical domain of metal, fans consumed the performances and symbols of metal community to engage in lengthy conversations with other metal fans and foster a sense of belonging through shared community histories and understandings. Allow us to briefly examine the slightly different forms and later applications of active consumption illustrated by these examples.

In the study of the CoP of metal fans, consumption within the figured world of metal was used to later foster a sense of community belonging through shared activity, including conversation, with similar others. Virtually all participants in the figured world of alternative music act as consumers. They listen to music, go out to shows, buy records, download music on the Internet, surf music blogs and websites, and more. But these mediated opportunities for musical consumption are not equal. An artifact's medium will communicate certain aspects of performance while ignoring others and place various limits on consumer interactivity. A book might provide a plethora of

contextualizing information enabling the consumer to understand connections between seemingly disparate genres, bands, etc. This textual artifact may describe a musical performance beautifully, but words can never equal the experience of hearing music. Likewise, a YouTube video posted on a Facebook page produces a much more decontextualized understanding than a book or even a record. While a consumer may gain some idea of the sound, techniques, and images associated with the music, it will be necessary to do much more research to understand the underpinning identities and meanings behind a particular musical performance. One inter-scene boundary I observed in Boone's current scene involved participant perceptions about the type of consumption and communication others engaged in. The biggest vinyl record consumers, for example, perceived those participants who seemed more plugged into the digital realm of musical exploration, listening, and buying to have narrower, shallower, and more transient musical interests.

The active participants I encountered in Boone's experimental music scene engaged in high levels of everyday consumption in ways that differ markedly from the average music consumer. Many thought about the stories, motivations, intentions, and other technical aspects of the music they listened to. Whether participants leveraged their musical consumption to hang out and converse, create stories (as I am attempting here), book shows, or engage in direct musical production, consumption almost always facilitated agency toward certain practical, creative purposes.

Of course, for those wishing to engage directly in creating music, there is more to everyday musical practice than the creative consumption of cultural artifacts. Participants must somehow synthesize this consumption into some unique, compelling new form. Valle & Weiss (2010) mentioned the importance of "talking about" and "talking within" practice. Where "talking about" developed criteria for evaluating performances in specific figured worlds, "talking within" involved explaining the technical aspects of practice. In her study on how popular musicians learn, Lucy Green (2001) focused on how individual musicians developed technical musical abilities, listing three means of direct musical engagement: "playing (to include singing), composing (to include improvising), and

listening (to include hearing)” (p. 22). She conceived musical practice as happening along a continuum and argued that popular musicians engage in “a variety of activities including memorizing, copying, jamming, embellishing, improvising, arranging, and composing” (41).

Pursuing trajectories of deepening participation necessitates the incorporation of multiple forms of practice into one’s day to day life. Creative participation involves engagement in routine and intentional practices enabling participants to cultivate understandings of cultural worlds as fluid processes, rather than stable products (Ortner, 2006). Certeau (1998) called more conscious actions, like engaging in a CoP working to produce rock ‘n’ roll performances, *strategies*, while he called day-to-day, less conscious practices, like music consumption, *tactics* (xix). Only through everyday practice, do subjects learn to recognize boundaries, gaps, and possibilities for new articulations, connections, and creative action. Lucy Green (2001) noted that most popular musicians, including session musicians and players in cover bands, used everyday instrumental practice and technical music knowledge as foundational tactics for making improvisatory leaps in public performances. She found that popular musicians very rarely repeated the exact sounds and structures of any given song. Rather, they improvised their own solos, added personal embellishments, and learned to approximate a wide variety of sounds and styles.

At the root of everyday practice lies the development of improvisation, or the fluency and flexibility to play with the inherited language and structures of one’s particular cultural world of engagement. Holland, Lachicotte, Jr., Skinner, and Cain (1998) focused on improvisation to reveal the presence of social structures as well as their limits of influence on everyday life. Structural domination always produced social ambiguities that individuals must deal with in creative ways. While the act of climbing up the house may have seemed unusual, focusing on the common element of improvisation revealed this act as consonant with many other everyday acts: “Oppressed people are constantly climbing up houses” (p. 16). Mexican graffiti culture constituted one pillar of a larger hip-hop culture encompassing rap, music, and dance. All these overlapping worlds rely on a “mixture of

improvisation and preparation gained through constant practice.” As one graffiti artist put it, “What is life if not an improvisation?” (Valle & Weiss, 2010, p. 130). Bringing improvisation into the realm of everyday life destabilizes Bourdieu’s notion of permanent dispositions toward relatively stable actions. Valle and Weiss defined improvisation as

the sort of impromptu actions that occur when our past, brought to the present as habitus, meets with a particular combination of circumstances and conditions for which we have no set response. Such improvisations are the openings by which change comes about from generation to generation. (p. 17-18)

For Certeau, every day practices were tactical “ways of operating: victories of the weak over the ‘strong’, ... clever tricks, knowing how to get away with things...” (xix). Especially for those operating on the margins of cultural structures, long-term participation often entails formidable challenges for which improvisation existed as a valuable tool. The illegality and time consuming nature of long-term participation in the figured world of graffiti meant many participants worked low-wage jobs, lived with parents, and, eventually quit. Persistent participants opened graffiti-oriented businesses or found other legitimate ways of making money in the graffiti world (Valle & Weiss, 2010).

While making experimental music is not illegal, this scene still operates on the margins, constantly justifying the value of its somewhat anti-commercial existence by continually making connections through which to carve out spaces for itself. Those in this scene who have pursued music over longer periods of time have developed ways around the limitations social structures place on a subject’s participation within the domain. Many take flexible, low-wage jobs as bar tenders, baristas, cooks, and servers, in order to leave room for musical pursuits. Others participate in the business of selling music or booking shows. Those who have persisted in keeping music part of their everyday lives have generally developed a proclivity for improvisation across boundaries and structural

obstacles of all kinds. Often, they also possess a more defined sense of what these structural obstacles are and the supports needed to sustain a musical scene over time.

A Brief Note on Language

Perhaps, the most unconscious improvisational actions occur when participants talk to one another, elaborate their understandings whilst hanging out, and engage in word-of-mouth efforts to maintain the scene. Language also appears as a tool used by CoPs to engage in more strategic improvisations, “talking about” and “talking within” practice to determine opportunities for expressing new identities and meanings. Even more strategic uses of language in the domain of alternative music appear in written artifacts like magazine and news articles, liner notes, show advertisements, printed interviews, recollections, etc. Many practice theorists have investigated the use of language in mediating conceptual relationships and advancing the goals of specific cultural domains.

We have already considered Giddens’ assertion that late modernity involves the technological freeing of social relations from specific places and “recombining them across wide time-space dimensions” (1991, p. 2). The postmodern “fragmented self,” discussed by Jameson, produced by such a situation (Sokefeld, 1999, p. 417) has created our present need for *cognitive mapping*, thus elevating the status of historical and personal memory (Ortner 2006, p. 122). For Richard Sennett (quoted in Ortner), language played a crucial internal role for practice because of the enabling ability of “people being able to narrate their lives in a coherent and meaningful way” (p. 125). Certeau (1984) explained that memory “causes distortions generated in the situation considered by the bringing together of qualitatively *heterogeneous dimensions* which are not merely contraries or contradictions ... permit[ting] the juxtaposition of *different* spaces in a single picture [*sic*]” (p. 84). In short, “memory is a sense of the other,” an expansion of one’s own perceptions through an understanding and “always being in the other’s place without possessing it” (p. 87). Even Wenger (2002) emphasized stories as

the best way to traverse the knowledge system in a way that explains the linkages between community activities, knowledge, resources, and performance outcomes. Only a story can describe these complex causal relations while incorporating implicit contextual factors that may be crucial to appreciate but hard to codify or generalize. ... The best way to assess the value of a community of practice, therefore, is by collecting stories. (p. 168)

Where nebulous boundaries (like genre labels, “punk,” “indie,” “alternative,” “rock”) exist, language presents a most useful tool for remaking existing structures and recoding the protocols for proper behavior and underlying understandings. Where contentious and improvisatory practice took place in Boone’s own alternative music history, participants often took pains to articulate their positions in word, whether this took the form of written recollections, zine articles, or song lyrics. Obviously my own efforts to write this thesis represents another attempt to use language to deepen understanding of situated musical practice. Expression in words, using a language more explicit and concrete than the abstract language of music sometimes presents the only recourse for untangling contested meanings and engagements within the figured world of music.

Conclusion

Ortner’s (2006) concept of *serious games* provides an apt metaphor for thinking about creative engagement and the underlying power dynamics subjects respond to and exercise in the pursuit of cultural projects. Ortner insisted individual actions never always respond to dominant powers or hegemonic structures, just as participants in the music scene I study here insisted their musical pursuits were in no way meant to oppose the town’s more dominant old-time and jam scenes. Participants sought only to advocate for and perform the music they found enjoyable, meaningful, and natural to themselves. Creative actions may more accurately be seen, then, as game “plays” that dominate and resist others in the pursuit of cultural projects. One of my informants explicitly viewed himself as a *player* in a cultural game unfolding within the particular alternative music field (his term was grounds, for he saw himself as “The Groundskeeper”) of downtown Boone.

This emphasis on creative agency, rather than resistance, in cultural worlds corresponds to Castells (2004b) idea that participants pursuing project identities “build a new identity that redefines their position in society and, by so doing, seek the transformation of overall social structure” (p. 8). We exist in a time when individuals in geographically disparate locations can engage in meaningful interactions and uncover surprising cultural connections with others almost anywhere in the world. The efflorescence of this networked reality of global cultures will undoubtedly continue to revise our past conceptions of national, regional, ethnic, familial, gender, class, and occupational identities.

Within Appalachian Studies scholars have recently begun discussing the usefulness of project identities for moving beyond territorial, resistance identities that produce such alienating insider/outsider dichotomies (Smith, et al., 2010). Project identities, instead, involve forging original connections, understanding the forces of domination imposed on all subjects, and systematically expanding the boundaries of our present understandings. According to Castells (2004b), the new capitalist economy of the twenty-first century will depend on the autonomous, self-programmable, creative capacity of individuals and groups working together in alternative global networks. Learning in communities of practice toward specific cultural projects situated at the intersection of geographic locales *and* virtual figured worlds represents one way of elevating consciousness about the fluidity of social structures and the cultivation of creative agency.

CHAPTER TWO

Research Methods

Participant observation represents the primary method used in generating qualitative data for this research on a music scene situated in the mountain town of Boone, North Carolina.

Geographically, Boone is located in western North Carolina's Blue Ridge, the mountain range forming the steep eastern escarpment of the larger Appalachian Mountain range that runs from Alabama to Canada, and forms the upland region of the eastern United States. Located at an elevation of approximately 3,333 feet, Boone is a semi-urban university town proximal to large tracts of preserved natural areas and other areas that would still be considered rural. While western North Carolina maintains strong currents of "traditional" Appalachian culture, the cultural environment of Boone is inseparable from that of Appalachian State University (ASU), the town's largest employer, and can best be described as that of a college town. Boone, like much of Appalachian North Carolina, receives much of its economic revenue through the tourism and development industries, with the result that the region's service-based job market provides mostly low-wage opportunities for many residents of the surrounding area. Having once possessed a reputation as a countercultural center, the increased tourism and development in Watauga County, where Boone is located, as well as the growth of ASU, continues to erode both the "traditional" and countercultural elements of the region.

I observed this experimental music scene informally for about a year, as both a participant observer and an observant participant, before I began keeping formal field notes in April 2010. After this period of more informal observation and gaining familiarity and rapport with other scene participants, I began to notice potential connections between this music scene and cultural studies of the Appalachian region, in general.

I conducted participant observation to discern patterns of behavior and social rituals at shows in downtown Boone. This scene featured performance aesthetics and meanings that fit uneasily under the traditional (mainly old-time and bluegrass) or party/jam band music scenes. Performers played more alternative musical styles than were typically welcome at venues seeking to book widely appealing, money-making musical acts. I use the term “experimental” here in as broad a manner as possible, in an attempt to capture the various ways these artists engage in musical experimentation. Some bands actively play with the way electronics can emulate and evoke the sounds of nature, challenging audiences to think about the rhythms and sounds of everyday life. Others play with elements of Appalachian identity, like family and collectivity, and consciously or unconsciously use music to comment upon contemporary social issues.⁵

These more experimental shows occurred at a few welcoming venues situated within or just outside of Boone’s downtown district. I attended many shows at the independent record store, 641 rpm. After this record store relocated from 641 to 691 King Street and stopped hosting electric shows in the summer of 2010, co-owner and local booking agent, Travis Reyes, began setting up shows at Black Cat Burrito, where crazy and loud rock shows took place in the early to mid 2000s. I saw performances take place on the deck and interior of Espresso News, a tucked away coffee shop off

⁵ I refer to Boone’s current alternative music scene as an “experimental” scene. While I do use the terms “alternative,” “indie,” and “underground” throughout, especially in talking about the history of underground rock music on the local, national, and international levels, here I employ the term “experimental” for several reasons. Boone is such a small town and participation in all music scenes is fluid enough that it would be a stretch to call even this scene an “underground” of any sort. While “alternative” may work for describing scenes that fall outside of dominant local music paradigms, today’s international underground musical worlds are so manifold that they hardly seem “alternative” to any hegemonic music paradigm. I also wish to avoid the misconception that I am talking about genre, as “alternative rock” and “indie rock.” While I consider some bands that rightly fall under these classificatory labels, it is not my aim to glorify a reified sound or image. Furthermore, “indie” no longer represents some music underground independent of corporate production and distribution, but occupies quite a mainstream position in contemporary popular music. Also, those who participate in old-time and jam band scenes tend to think of themselves as, also, existing outside mainstream music. From an Appalachian Studies perspective, as well, the use of “independent” as a cultural descriptor, in all its positive and negative connotations, overlooks the inescapable interdependence and interconnections of all beings, events, etc. I use “experimental” in order to emphasize my focus on musical activities and processes that unfold in multiple, sometimes contradictory, but always playful ways.

Howard Street, owned by a local artist and employing several participants of the scene under consideration. Across the street from this coffee shop sits an empty building where two local artists, Mike and Charlie, created a pop-up gallery featuring weekly art and experimental rock shows in October 2009. In September 2010, Fat Cats Books, Music, & Video, just outside of downtown, on the other side of Rivers Street, hosted a diverse music festival that featured Boone's entire spectrum of original music acts. Finally, since September 2010, a house venue called The Underground, just outside of downtown going west on 421, has managed to book regular, well-attended basement shows.

I used interviewing as a second method for gathering more meaning-centered and personal background data of active participants, mostly musicians and show organizers. Using non-probability, purposive sampling, I identified and selected twenty-one scene participants actively involved in creating or facilitating the performance of experimental music in Boone. Five of these interviewees included local music historians, those involved in creating or documenting previous decades of alternative music in Boone. Two of these five interviews happened over long-distance email. I conducted seventeen interviews with active music makers in the current experimental scene. One local historian fell into this category, and it ought to be noted that more often than not, active music makers wore many hats. Participation in multiple scene activities (i.e. booking shows, creating show posters or other music-related artwork, networking with state and regional bands, managing local alternative media outlets/independent record shops) was not uncommon.⁶

My focus on how active participants engaged in learning about and through musical performance precluded the necessary inclusion of those who participated in less active ways (i.e. attending some shows). That being said, I attempt to recognize that situations and moments of less active, more peripheral participation also involved learning. My sample includes individuals clustered

⁶ All interviewees, with the exception of an individual referred to by the pseudonym Dylan Thomas, granted me permission to use their legal names in this study.

around four main communities of practice (centered around bands) that form the backbone of the present scene: The Gods, The Family, The Buds, and The Company. Interviewed participants operating more independently, or on the margins of these groups contributed especially valuable insights into the nebulous boundaries of this scene, the inter-scene tensions, and perceived boundaries between this scene and other local music communities, like the old-time community or ASU's music school community. I asked all participants questions pertaining to personal music history and influences, community and art, identity, and personal background.

Out of my seventeen interviews of current, active scene participants, four fell between the ages of twenty and twenty-four, two were above thirty. The majority of participants fell between the ages of twenty-five and twenty-nine, and represented many non-undergraduate students and ASU graduates living in Boone as full-time, year-round residents. All except two selected Caucasian or White as their ethnicity. One claimed to be part Japanese, the other part Puerto Rican. Most remained ambivalent about identifying as Southern. Even those born within the mountain region hesitated to call themselves Appalachian. Several cited an unwillingness to embrace what they saw as negative aspects of Southern or Appalachian identity (i.e. the ignorant or uncivilized hillbilly. A couple participants even considered Southern manners/politeness a cultural factor inhibiting genuine communication and creative development), while others preferred a more loosely defined country or rural identification. One interviewee wished to avoid any regionally-based affiliation whatsoever. Members of The Gods, the most locally situated and networked of the main CoPs under consideration, emphasized more of a working-class identification, rather than a regional one.

Using the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) designation of Appalachian boundaries, thirteen of the total twenty-one interviewees were native Appalachians, with most of these clustered in The Gods and The Family contingents. Even native Appalachian experiences differed widely, however. Many came from "down the mountain," growing up in foothill communities. One grew up in Boone, the son of two ASU professors. Only a few miles away, another participant lived a

drastically different childhood, growing up in rural Bethel, NC, on the North Carolina/Tennessee line. Most of the remaining participants migrated to Boone from the Research Triangle (Raleigh, Durham, Chapel Hill) area or Charlotte. The Company consisted of ASU students from suburbs of Raleigh (Apex and Cary, primarily). While many of these participants were students of Appalachian culture, others in this contingent not only eschewed an Appalachian identification, but failed to perceive any regional connection or identification among participants of this scene. One participant called Hawaii home, and another participant was born and raised in central Georgia.

Of the seventeen interviewees in the current scene, only four were female. Two of these four females were related members of a single CoP, The Family. While a more balanced gender representation may have illuminated key differences in situated learning for females versus males in the creation of experimental music, the lack of balance reflects the current reality of a dominant male presence in the creation and production of this local music scene. While relatively few female performers exist compared to males, it is interesting to note that, at least, at The Underground basement shows, audiences included slightly more females than males. I speculate this related to the more student-centered crowd that this all-ages venue, leased and managed by a handful of ASU students (many of whom study in University College, and the increasingly popular SD program), draws. It also seems reflective of the higher percentage of females to males at ASU.

Because I am a performing participant in the music scene under consideration here, I also employ autoethnography, a radical, interdisciplinary fusion of autobiography and ethnographic writing “that connects personal and cultural experience. Autoethnographers not only observe the world around them, but also examine their internal perceptions about their place in the world” (Berger & Ellis, 2002, p. 156). Autoethnography critiques traditional social scientific stances on objectivity, validity, and ethical obligation by challenging the idea of the disembodied, disinterested researcher. The method, therefore, argues for ways of knowing encompassing the emotional and experiential. My use of autoethnography will make transparent my own biases, enable the inclusion of the situated

experiences and personal meanings that ground and inspire this research, and allow me to reflect on what I most immediately know about learning through musical engagement and performance. It will also benefit the study by adding another female perspective to a male-dominated scene.

A fourth and final component of my methodology involves online ethnography. Over the course of this research and my involvement with scene participants, I came to realize that a great deal of scene communication and planning occurred online. This communication happened particularly via Facebook, and most heavily among a contingent of the scene involving participants associated with The Company and The Family. I spent a significant portion of time keeping up with participant music-related status updates, musical information sharing (including links to YouTube videos), personal networking, and show booking and promotion.

Limits of Applicability

This research, like all research, has its flaws and limits to reliability and repeatability of findings. The learning processes I found within this one local music community will differ from other music scenes in other places with different geographical setting, individual participants, sociocultural histories, set of enabling and constraining structures, and levels and types of engagement with various musical and non-musical figured worlds. How participants perceive and engage with others and act upon collective projects and cultural pursuits differs from place to place and, sometimes, from circumstance to circumstance. Each place and time will have its own set of boundary markers and possible trajectories for participation.

Furthermore, I have certainly missed much by not having a clarified question from the beginning of this research. Had I the opportunity for re-implementation, I would have asked more direct questions about how active participants search out new music and how they consciously interpret musical experience and construct meanings from them. Thankfully, participant observation adequately supplemented interviews to capture much of this process once I did have a clarified understanding of the question. Despite these limitations, the data collected and analyzed ought to

present some valid, trustworthy findings contributing to an understanding of how learning happens in social contexts set against the backdrop of local and global, historically-contingent, sociocultural worlds.

The theoretical lens of legitimate peripheral participation within communities of practice provided a strong organizational foundation and vocabulary for talking about the processes I observed in the field. Without close attention to this theoretical literature, the autoethnographic component of this research may have produced a less objective analysis of this ethnographic account. I believe, however, that my commitment to seeking a theoretical framework for understanding the behaviors and motivations of participants produced valid findings that add to the growing literature on how learning happens in informal local and global communities of music practice. That being said, I cannot erase the fact that before I became a participant observer, I was a performing member of this scene, with established friendships and other personal connections. Without a doubt, these prior relationships influenced my selection of interviewees. Another researcher would have likely come up with a slightly different interview sample. I could not interview everyone; and, to be sure there were a number of active participants I would have liked to have interviewed, but did not, for one reason or another. Because this experimental scene is so small and so centered on a handful of independent media outlets and locally-owned businesses, however, I am confident that anyone interested in looking at the practices of its most active participants and performers would have included most of the individuals I consulted.

Data Analysis

Employing the theoretical concepts of legitimate peripheral participation in communities of practice, I identify variables that effect participation and learning in a community engaged in understanding and performing meaningful figured worlds of alternative music. Legitimacy is one such variable found at all levels of scene interaction. Experience (what one knows or understands) and competence (what one can do) are legitimacy indicators. One can possess lots of experience

playing old-time, for example, along with the competence to play several different instruments in a variety of more traditional styles, without these experiences or competencies counting for much in terms of the way some within this experimental scene understand legitimacy and authentic performance. Different types of experience and competence matter in establishing boundaries of community identity. Relative hierarchies and trajectories of participation depend on the subjectivities of others and create contested situations wherein boundaries of inclusion and exclusion inevitably arise. Peripheral experiences at these boundaries, however, often produce valuable insights and opportunities for new connections and community learning through the expansion of understood meaning.

In analyzing the qualitative data produced from the above methods, I will use interviews and participant observation to examine the cooperative and competitive play of different types of legitimacy and the boundaries participants perform and negotiate in an Appalachian experimental music scene. By examining contested boundaries of community identity and various marginalities, differences in understanding and opportunities for learning will reveal themselves. The issue of money and whether shows ought to be free, for example, represents one contentious boundary in Boone's local experimental music scene. At first, I was tempted to regard age as an independent variable upon which one's stance about artistic compensation depended. I now think the situation is more complex, having to do with a combination of experience, competence, and socioeconomic stage of life (rather than the stable "status") as variables contributing to how one feels about combining music and money.

CHAPTER THREE

Historical Overview of Appalachian Identity in the Figured World of American Indie Music, 1980-2010

Moonshine, guns, decapitated heads, haints, hot rods, hot pants, hot dogs, and his own made-for-hunchin,' badass brand of rock 'n' roll—the one and only one-man-band, Hasil (pronounced “hassle”) “Haze” Adkins talked about it all in a 1985 article “based on a coupla” interviews for the New York-based zine *Kicks*. After introducing the “hot-wired hillbilly” as “rock & roll’s premiere wild man,” *Kicks* described Adkins’ Madison, West Virginia homeplace, “maybe 20 or 30 miles from where the Hatfields and McCoys duked it out.” The wannabe-Elvis lived in a “tar paper shack his daddy built.” In Adkins’ own words, he lived “way back far away from anybody—like Boris Karloff” (Miller, 1985, p. 6). The savage, outlaw image that earned Adkins the adoration of these 1980s, urban post-punkers, carefully combined a half-ironic, playfully self-aware Appalachian identity with a downhome rock ‘n’ roll authenticity and pride.

In a post-*Deliverance*, Reagan-era America, some embraced the horrifying hillbilly image and turned it on its head for a new generation. The above snapshot illustrated one negotiation of Appalachian identity within a parallel cultural phenomenon similarly dissonant with America’s cultural mainstream: American indie music. Born in the late 1970s in opposition to the corporate-controlled mainstream pop music industry, this underground music network negotiated and re-negotiated aspects of its own identity as it grew. As the movement diversified beyond punk, various aspects of roots music resonated with many indie artists. These musicians have appropriated, experimented with, and helped to expand popular representations of Appalachian and, more generally, Southern rural identity within the larger context of American culture and history.

Appalachian Identity

Many social scientists explored Appalachian identity in American culture. In postmodernist fashion, historian Henry Shapiro argued that “Appalachia” existed only as a construction of ideas. Its diverse culture and geography made it difficult to consider Appalachia a distinct, homogenous region somehow separate from America’s cultural mainstream. Drawing on local color literature and missionary texts, Shapiro argued that an emerging national consciousness created a distinct Appalachian identity because of changes in the way America perceived itself by the latter half of the nineteenth century. By the turn of the twentieth century, social scientists established themselves in the region as an education and research component of a larger national program of regional uplift begun with mainline Protestant missions in the years following the Civil War. Their scholarship lent pseudo-scientific credence to the contradictory notions of Appalachian violence, indolence, poverty, isolation, genetic purity, independence, and folk cultural worth already in popular circulation at the time. These biased representations reveal less about Appalachia than they do about a rapidly urbanizing and industrializing America in search of a coherent national identity (Shapiro, 1978).

Anthropologist Allen Batteau’s *The Invention of Appalachia* (1990) borrowed much from Shapiro’s analysis. However, Batteau claimed that images played the more significant role in simplifying and shaping popular American conceptions of a complex and shifting Appalachian otherness. He presented nature, poverty, and folklife as the primary archetypal symbols used by interrelated groups, within and without the region, to construct a few standard narratives of Appalachian identity: myth-making, sacrifice, social drama, pilgrimage, and commodity. Like Shapiro, Batteau argued that historically contingent cultural changes produced mass media explanations of a perceived Appalachian otherness. The American imagination invented “Appalachia” to mirror its own repressed desires, fears, and values in an often uncertain, incomprehensible world.

Literature professor Jerry Williamson's *Hillbillyland: What the Movies Did to the Mountains and What the Mountains Did to the Movies* (1995) extended Batteau's focus on Appalachian imagery to examine hillbilly identity in American film. His definition of "hillbilly" included inhabitants of other rural parts of the United States as well as other mountainous regions the world over. He, too, claimed that since the construction of a "mainstream" American culture, America has needed the marginal hillbilly figure to map its historical trajectory and future development. For this reason, hillbillies sometimes represented honor and independence. In other times, the same image evoked primitive carnality and horror. Williamson's hillbillies fell into several categories: fools, frontiersmen, social bandits, monsters, good ol' boys, mama's boys, and unruly women.

Historian Anthony Harkins' *Hillbilly* (2004) traced the hillbilly through twentieth century music, television, and film. He argued that the hillbilly's persistence in popular media related directly to the ambiguous and mutable nature of hillbilly identity and images in American consciousness. Harkins linked hillbilly disappearances and resurgences on the national stage to class and race-based cultural factors. Early hillbilly records, for example, provided "imagery of personal independence, romantic landscapes, or a nostalgic past rooted in the traditional values of family, home, and faith" for "displaced Americans and thousands of others who felt psychologically adrift" in Depression-era America (p. 89).

Since the 1970s, increasing numbers of rural people, nation-wide, proudly reclaimed a hillbilly identity. The Civil Rights and environmental movements played crucial roles in catalyzing this regional identity movement. Aligned with a supposed folk culture, positive Appalachian representations often laud such mountaineer traits as independence, kinship, and a closer relationship with land. While having largely disappeared from mass media representations of working-class, white southerners, Harkins insisted that hillbilly identity and images survived in other ways. A "growing number of professional musicians," for example, "have associated themselves with different elements of the hillbilly label and persona." By the 1980s, commercially successful outlaw country musicians

like Dwight Yoakam, Steve Earle, the Judds, and Marty Stuart “position[ed] themselves as ‘hillbilly’ inheritors of a raucous yet proud musical and cultural heritage” (p. 216-217). Until the last couple decades of the twentieth century, this type of brash, unapologetic Appalachian pride did not appear in mainstream American music. Appalachian identification rarely appeared outside of those music genres and circles most often considered Appalachian music.

Appalachian Music

How might one characterize Appalachian music and who decides what music falls inside and outside of this regional designation? Following Shapiro and Batteau’s postmodern arguments for the invention of a distinct Appalachian identity, country music scholar Bill C. Malone (2004) asserted:

There is no such thing as “Appalachian music.” There are instead a wide variety of instrumental and vocal styles made by Appalachian musicians, many of which have exerted great influence in the larger realm of American music and all of which have exhibited the eclectic and steadily evolving nature of life in the mountains (p. 115).

What Americans popularly considered Appalachian music derived from a careful selection of cultural elements and music genres that uphold familiar positive and negative Appalachian stereotypes. British folklorist Cecil Sharp contributed to a perception of Appalachia as an isolated, self-inculcating reservoir of pure British folk survivals, including unaccompanied Child ballads from a simpler, pre-industrial, non-commercial time. With the aid of Olive Dame Campbell, Sharp’s 1916 collecting journey through the southern Appalachians resulted in the influential 1917 publication of *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians*. One must keep in mind that Sharp arrived in the southern mountains with the specific agenda of locating the oldest, mainly British, musical materials he could find. His work helped solidify the idea of Appalachian music as a preservation of British heritage within an isolated folk culture unsullied by the homogenizing forces of urban industrialism and its accompanying commercial pretensions.

In the 1920s, a more overtly commercial Appalachian music emerged when record companies sought to boost sales by targeting the millions of migrants leaving the rural South for the industrial centers of the South and Midwest. During the years between World Wars I and II, record companies began recording rural, working-class music from the American South, marketing them as race records and hillbilly music. While race records featured African Americans performing music targeted to an African American audience, the recording industry marketed hillbilly music to Southern whites and displaced Southerners nostalgic for the lost homeplace and its slower, simpler life. On the face of it, hillbilly music appeared as white as the Appalachian folk music promoted by Cecil Sharp and supported by the elite academic audiences throughout the nation. However, the sounds of commercial hillbilly music presented a more ethnically diverse and stylistically inclusive picture of the music circulating through the rural South during this time. The Carter Family, for example, drew from a reservoir of common songs and styles that included a pastiche of “nineteenth century pop tunes, gospel resources, African American items, and some British folk fragments” (Malone, 2004, p. 118). Appalachian performers like Clarence “Tom” Ashley, The Carter Family, and Dock Boggs were directly influenced by black performers.⁷ This hillbilly music contained romantic, pastoral imagery, but also encompassed the images and symbols of the industrial transformations taking place on America’s cultural and natural landscapes. Roads and railroads, the mill, the coal mine, the boss man, the family farm all appear in songs that expressed fear, hunger, longing, spiritual faith and other aspects of a pre-industrial, rural, agrarian worldview. During the Great Depression, with labor issues at the forefront of American politics, folk songs protested the poverty of a downtrodden working-class, temporarily merging the interests of the folk and commercial Appalachian music camps.

Appalachian identity in popular American music became less distinct after Depression-era depictions of coalfield poverty rendered the mountaineer image undesirable and the cowboy replaced the hillbilly as a symbol of American independence, power, and virtue (Malone, 1993). Even before

⁷ See Hay (2003) for a good introduction to Appalachian music.

hillbilly music diffused into the more commercially homogenized, urban-centered styles of country and bluegrass, the recording industry invented rather than discovered any distinct Appalachian music. Recordings marketed as “hillbilly” often featured non-Appalachian performers (like Hank Williams from Alabama, Mississippian Jimmie Rodgers, and the Texan Ernest Tubb). They included classically trained interpreters of Appalachian folk materials (like John Jacob Niles and Buell Kazee) who record companies encouraged to sound or appear more Southern. Many mountain-born musicians sought distance from the derogatory hillbilly label and preferred to perform in their Sunday best or don the latest fashions, rather than appear in any stereotypical hillbilly or country garb. Others often performed imported Tin Pan Alley “hillbilly” songs. Furthermore, bluegrass, the genre most closely associated with Appalachia, originated in the bluegrass region of central Kentucky. Malone (2007) described the link between bluegrass and mountain identity as but one example of “the powerful persistence of the Appalachian idea in American popular culture—the preference of imagination over reality” (p. 144). Such an association overlooks the reality of bluegrass’s ethnically diverse musical influences and urban origins. It also ignores the diverse array of musical genres and styles played in the mountains today.

The early 2000s commercial success of such movies and movie soundtracks as *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000), *Songcatcher* (2000), and *Cold Mountain* (2003) indicated that American pop culture’s romance with Appalachian music remained alive and well. It also revealed that the parallel tendency to apply the Appalachian label to anything old, rural, or Southern persisted with it. While the media made much of the supposed Appalachianness of *O Brother*, for example, the movie took place in the Mississippi Delta during the Great Depression. Furthermore, the movie’s soundtrack featured only one mountain-born performer, Ralph Stanley, singing “Man of Constant Sorrow.” The idea of Appalachian music continued to conjure images of roots, home, and alternatives to mainstream American culture. It also reflected the interchangeable and overlapping nature of Appalachian and rural Southern culture and identity in the popular American imagination. This

conflation exists even in the more elite, authenticity-obsessed folklore approach to Appalachian music, as well. At least since 1952 when Folkways released Harry Smith's influential *Anthology of American Folk Music*, Appalachian folk music has been presented side by side with other rural, Southern folk music styles and performances. Appalachian music does not exist as a single sound, genre, image, or identity separate from rural, Southern culture and music.

In *Hillbilly*, Harkins (2004) briefly mentioned less commercial artists, like Hasil Adkins and Chapel Hill-based, Southern Culture on the Skids, who blended hillbilly music with other popular music genres and “embraced less the hillbilly label than the persona of the media-inspired crazed mountaineer” (217). The following story concerns the various ways musicians working within an American indie music framework, positioned somewhere between a popular American music industry and a more grassroots academic folk network, have negotiated Appalachian identity. Because of the common appropriation and popular diffusion of this identity, many of the artists discussed herein may seem to possess oblique or inconsequential links to Appalachia. However, this historical overview seeks to uncover what, why, and how performers of diverse musical genres from within and without the region become motivated to communicate a rural, Southern identity. Such a broad, inclusive treatment of Appalachian identity allowed for the most in-depth exploration of the complex connections and oppositions between a supposed Appalachian otherness and a more and more nebulous mainstream American culture.

Psychobilly: Punk Rock's Hillbilly Excursion

By the early 1980s, networks of independent record shops, labels, distributors, fanzines, and college radio stations emerged in support of a stripped down, more abrasive form of rock 'n' roll called punk rock.⁸ For an up and coming generation facing the realities of the Vietnam War, an energy crisis, political corruption, a shaky economy, and an uncertain future, the escapist commercial

⁸ Independent record labels did exist before the 1970s. See Broven (2009) for a history of America's first independent record labels, like Sun, Chess, Atlantic, and Motown.

music of the early 1970s prompted a musical backlash. The new punk rock embraced radical communitarian values and the need for local and individual empowerment, rejecting the idea of the distant, virtuosic rock musician. Many bands sought to obliterate performance barriers between audience and performer by encouraging fans to pick up instruments, join the band on-stage, and, ideally, gain the confidence to make their own music. A Marxist, yet “micro-capitalist,” do-it-yourself ethos encouraged the reclamation of the means of musical production and distribution (Azerrad, 2001). Many musicians and music enthusiasts created their own small, independent record labels, shops, and fanzines. Music journalists Michael Azerrad (2001) and Simon Reynolds (2006) continue to classify “independent music” based upon whether or not an artist or album received distribution independently of corporate, major label support.

Punk’s first wave exposed the confusion and disaffection of the time, but its predominantly white, male identity turned into another reactionary dead-end. While punk’s political and theoretical engagement during this early period (from 1976 to 1978, when punk popularly exploded shortly before being pronounced dead) directed attention to class-based problems, it did little to further debates about race or gender. Many post-punk bands expanded and diversified punk’s collective identity by openly embracing and experimenting with ethnically diverse musical traditions. Others, like The Cramps, engaged with a white musical “other” by “drawing out and exaggerating all the deviant, demonic elements of rockabilly” (Morrison, 1996, p. 250). The Cramps introduced America to a new music called psychobilly. The music represented an amalgam of rockabilly, surf music, psychedelia, garage and punk rock. Ignoring post-punk’s obsessive desire to transcend the musical restrictions of the past, psychobilly illustrated punk’s search for tradition in the roots of rock ‘n’ roll.

The two consistent members of The Cramps’ revolving cast, husband and wife team Lux Interior (vocals) and Poison Ivy Rorschach (lead guitar), met in Sacramento before moving to New York, playing Max’s Kansas City and CBGB’s during punk’s brief New York heyday. The Cramps performed the carnal, crazed hillbilly stereotype. Their sci-fi, gothic sensibility came out in Ivy’s

dominatrix attire as much as in Interior's singing about bones, blood, death, werewolves, and zombies. Beneath their wild stage personas, however, Ivy and Interior were also serious record collectors. Between California and New York, they spent two years in Akron, Ohio scouring record shops throughout the Midwest and South for old hillbilly 78s. They were also avid hunters of early rhythm and blues and rock and roll 45s, consciously drawing inspiration from the B-sides of rockabilly singles where "weirder" sounds could be found, where "it was just the band having fun... That's a whole genre... that is incredibly strange music, because it was all these hillbillies on speed," Interior explained (Vale, 1993, p. 12). Enamored with these wild sounds, The Cramps traveled to Memphis, employing Big Star's Alex Chilton to help record their 1980 debut *Songs the Lord Taught Us* in Sam Phillips' legendary Sun Studios.

Though they used "psychobilly" on their 1976 show posters, The Cramps disavowed the term as a genre category as second-generation bands appropriated the imagery and theatrics of psychobilly without understanding the cultural context and historical predecessors of the music (Morrison, 1996).⁹ But the label stuck because it so aptly described a song like "Garbage Man." Opening with the sounds of a revving chainsaw, Interior followed the obvious *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974) allusion with the confrontational, yet playful line: "you ain't no punk, you punk." The song poked fun at the naiveté and solipsism of a predominantly white, middle-class punk scene, insisting that working-class people laboring for a living were the real punks: "One half hillbilly and one half punk / Big long legs and one big mouth / The hottest thing from the north to come out of the south."

After a stint as The Cramps' drummer, Miriam Linna co-founded Norton Records and the fanzine *Kicks* in the early 1980s. In its pages, the 1950s and 1960s predecessors of psychobilly received their due attention. The magazine reintroduced Appalachian wild-man Hasil Adkins as the real, raw deal, relishing such twisted lyrics as: "I'm gonna put your head on my wall / Just like I told

⁹The Cramps took the term "psychobilly" from a Johnny Cash song written by Wayne Kemp. "One Piece at a Time," recorded in 1976, told the story of a "psychobilly cadillac" cobbled together a piece at a time.

you, baby / You can't talk no more / Can't eat no more hot dogs." This roots revival did not adhere to a strictly white, mountain affiliation, though. Urban, hillbilly punkers emulated Adkins' song subjects and style, as much as they did the rockabilly guitar machinations of the North Carolina-born, part-Shawnee Link Wray. The distorted guitar-laden, anti-authoritarian classic "Rumble" became the only instrumental ever banned from radio play. Wray's "primitiveness" garnered publicity, while his glorification of juvenile rebellion and invention of the power chord made him the de facto godfather of both punk and heavy rock. A flamboyant progenitor of shock rock, Cleveland, Ohio's Screamin' Jay Hawkins also influenced psychobilly performers with his theatrical piano performances, bizarre on-stage grunting, and gothic, voodoo stage props (Morrison, 2006, p. 252).

While some performers embodied a crazed hillbilly persona, most post-punk outfits of the late 1970s and early 1980s denied or, at least, hesitated to embrace a country identity. *Spin* described The Meat Puppets' sound as "psychedelic bluegrass thrash," clearly indicating country inflections (Dolan, 2005, p. 136). The Phoenix, Arizona band's drummer Derrick Bostrom told *Suburban Relapse*, a South Florida zine, in 1984, that despite Arizona's rurality and the country music twang, the Meat Puppets didn't feel very "southern-minded." He explained that, for him, country music meant topics more than musical style and that "countryrockjazzfusion" more accurately described the band's music (Boz and Libby, 1984, p. 5). If the band didn't ascribe to a country identity, they appreciated what they saw as compelling and appropriated the valuable aspects of it. Cris Kirkwood, the band's bassist, began playing music after seeing *Deliverance*. Learning to play the banjo, Kirkwood explained, "turned [him] on to the brain's ability to grow. ... It also turned [him] on to humanity, ... the development of culture. The development of the need to express oneself" (Moehlis, 2010). Derek Bostrom also counted the slower pace of country living and the escape from the urban rat-race as some valuable aspects of rural life (Boz & Libby, 1984, p. 5). Similarly, the Violent Femmes, formed in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 1980, resisted the "folk punk" label. Lead vocalist/guitarist Gordon Gano told *Suburban Relapse* he didn't identify with the term because it

obscured the jazz, funk, and soul elements that also inspired the music. However, Gano did maintain a love for the old country music of his childhood and “the old standard Baptist hymns which [he] remember[ed] hearing as a baby” (Latino, 1984, p. 7).

Some may have shied away from country/folk/hillbilly/rural identification as a result of self-conscious class affiliations. Front-man Jeffrey Lee Pierce, of the L.A. blues-influenced “death rock” band Gun Club, explained how the band settled on its name:

We were playing these real backwoods locations, like in Arkansas, and we got all kinds of rednecks and soldiers from nearby military bases to come hear us because they thought they were going to join a gun club. ... they would come up and talk to us between sets and say things like ‘Oh yeah, they’re training us with M-60 machine guns right now...’ (Rock, Goodman, & Goodman, 1988)

This remembrance didn’t negatively portray country identity and life so much as it revealed something about the limited livelihood opportunities open to rural, Southern people. The federal government has long recruited poor Southerners into military occupations that force them to embody the stereotypes of rural primitivism and violence, though in nationalistic, economically viable, and socially sanctioned ways. Since before World War II, the establishment of military bases throughout the South figured prominently in America’s plans for economic development in the region (Williams, 2002). That many working-class, rural-raised people lacked the same privilege as bands like The Cramps to claim or refute the stereotypes of rural identity must have given Gun Club pause.

Many post-punkers disdained the hippie nostalgia and romanticization of roots music. Thus, they attempted to avoid the sort of debilitating reverence that crystallized music in some supposedly pure, traditional folk form and discouraged artistic alteration of these musical idioms. Jeffrey Lee Pierce echoed a sentiment repeated by many experimenters and reinterpreters of old, rural musics: “The point of the blues is getting involved in the whole attitude and the mood and the feeling and the expression of the thing. Not how well you can play John Lee Hooker’s guitar lick, but to play John

Lee Hooker's guitar lick with the same conviction and reason that he played" (Pickett, 1982, p. 6). Though the spirit of rural, Southern music now demanded respect, how one ought to think of actual Southerners remained more ambiguous.

Closer to the Southern mountains, punk bands like Corrosion of Conformity (C.O.C.) and Ugly Americans, both from the Research Triangle area of the North Carolina Piedmont, painted uglier pictures of Southerners than "outsiders" did. C.O.C. confirmed that national stereotypes of ignorance, intolerance, and religious fundamentalism reigned in the South (Joe, Brady, Thomas, and Flipside, A., 1984). Ugly Americans claimed they experienced

an abundance of macho, ignorant redneck assholes here who subscribe to the old fast car, fast fuck, drugs and kick-ass rock 'n' roll ethic. ... Speaking of "kicking ass," that's one of their favorite pastimes, especially if you're a "nigger," "fag," or someone who "don't look right." Danny Hooligan, the band's guitarist, added that "[o]n the other hand, there's a lot of black people here who despise whites ... and like to beat the shit out of white boys," resulting in a situation "where being 'cool' and/or tough were more important than learning anything" (Maximumrocknroll, 1984). For some Southern bands, the "redneck" identity represented a powerful and ever-present expression of whiteness that meant backwardness and hate. They described the interpersonal, interracial, and interclass tensions at home from first-hand experience. Furthermore, they saw religion as part of the problem.

Hardcore punk bands often extolled the virtues of community, rejecting the individualism and materialism of modern mainstream American culture. However, the notion that modernity entailed secularism prevailed, especially for individuals from the South where fundamentalist Christianity maintained a strong presence (Maximumrocknroll, 1984). The hardcore and metal scenes, especially, retained much of punk's machismo and aggression. When one C.O.C. member admitted to wanting to be like R.E.M.'s Michael Stipe, a band-mate responded: "You mean you wanna take it up the butt?" Times were changing though; and, by the time of this 1984 interview, R.E.M.'s highly emotional and

spiritually-infused Southern music had already begun to change the direction of America's underground music.

The Surreal, New South

By the mid-1980s, more than hardcore pulsed through American indie music. Music journalist Michael Azerrad (2001) called the tumultuous 1985 tour featuring the California-based hardcore band, The Minutemen, opening for Athens, Georgia's R.E.M. "a passing of the torch from the hardcore-associated pioneers of the indie scene to what [Minutemen bassist Mike] Watt call[ed] 'college radio,' a less desperate strain of music for a whole new generation." Mike Watt called R.E.M. "folk music" (p. 90), while R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck called proto-punk outfits like the Velvet Underground, New York Dolls, and Pere Ubu more punk than most hardcore bands (Aaron, 2005). Mark Kemp (2004) remembered R.E.M.'s early live performances as rather inept, but delightfully raucous countrified punk affairs that quickly evolved into a sublime rock sound suited to singer Michael Stipe's oblique, warbled lyrics and on-stage, trance-like swaying. In the politically conservative Reagan years of the early 1980s, R.E.M. demonstrated a refreshing ability to foster common identity across a growing national independent music network. While "hardcore punks raged against the U.S.'s cultural and political depravity, ... this new group of underground bands ... had an oddly traditional, even patriotic, chip on its shoulder" (Aaron, 2005, p. 17).

Formed in Athens, Georgia in 1980, R.E.M., unlike many of their hardcore predecessors, expressed a dark romantic appreciation of the Southern landscape. Their first album, *Murmur* (1983), displayed a mauve-tinted photo of a wooden bridge choked by an ocean of creeping kudzu, the vestiges of civilization strangled by the unstoppable laws and dark impulses of nature. Peter Buck described the South, like a Flannery O'Connor story, as "a strange, slow, surrealistic place" (Heiman, 2008, par. 3). Michael Stipe, the ambitious art-school dropout, cultivated an aura of mystery that extended from the band's lyrics and album art to the nurturing, dreamtime South from which their music derived. Introduced by influential "Athens alternative music hero," artist, and prolific folk

music collector and performer, Art Rosenbaum, the band used the work of folk artist Reverend Howard Finster, a sometime Baptist preacher from Appalachian north Georgia, for the cover of their album *Reckoning* (F. Hay, personal communication, January 18, 2011). Busy with whimsical figures and Bible verses, Finster's surreal folk art soon after appeared on a Talking Heads album and eventually found its way into many museum folk collections and prestigious art galleries (Heiman, 2008).

Locating artistic inspiration in the landscape corresponded with an appreciation of Southern folk culture; and, north Georgia's subterranean energy, Victorian architecture, and natural mystique provided place-based inspiration for R.E.M. and many others (Sullivan, 1998). The folk-art aesthetic not only fit well with R.E.M.'s vision of a semi-gothic South, it provided an earthy complement to punk's do-it-yourself aesthetic. If pride in actual Southerners remained rare, artists found worth in the landscape, echoing Batteau's narrative of nature's regenerative properties. The rural landscape became precious for its ability to impart creative inspiration. The post-punk party band, The B52-s, who formed in 1976 and spawned the Athens pop/rock scene that R.E.M. and lesser known bands, like Pylon and Sloppy Seconds, would perpetuate, recently spoke about how the land yielded more direct inspiration. Not surprisingly, marijuana and magic mushrooms were plentiful and played large inspirational roles:

"That was just an extension of our lifestyle," [drummer Keith] Strickland says. "We would go out to the University of Georgia where they had this agricultural department and they had all these cow pastures – and one summer's day, we got word that the mushrooms were sprouting. So everyone drives out to these pastures. . ." "With shopping bags!" interjects the New Jersey-raised [lead vocalist and percussionist Fred] Schneider. "It was like a social thing, you know? You could go and meet all your friends." (Paphides, 2008)

While hugely popular and undeniably influential, R.E.M. was just one part of a larger movement that sought to rekindle Southern musical pride in the 1980s. Bands such as Fetchin Bones

(Charlotte, NC), Jason and the Nashville Scorchers (Nashville, TN), and Flat Duo Jets (Chapel Hill, NC) also presented prideful notions of Southern heritage. Many performing advocates of this new Southern pride, however, hailed from within as well as from outside the region. “Naming themselves after Southern slang for exaggerated ‘bouffant’ hairdos,” a couple of the B-52s hailed from New Jersey, while R.E.M.’s Peter Buck grew up in California (Paphides, 2008). In fact, though R.E.M. members Mike Mills and Bill Berry met while attending high school in Macon, Georgia, they, too, came from California and Minnesota, respectively, making Stipe the only Georgia-born member of the band (Sullivan, 1998; F. Hay, personal communication, January 18, 2011). In Athens during this time, north Georgia native Fred Hay often gave Peter Buck, then an employee at a used record shop, suggestions for which sixties soul records he ought to listen to in exchange for deals on record purchases. He recalled:

In the late 70s, REM was basically a garage band playing bad Rolling Stone covers for frat parties. Stipe always had this thing about Jagger. He was already trying to make his own place but was not there yet (collecting pigeon bones on the roof of the Morton Theater). (F. Hay, personal communication, January 18, 2011)

This comment illuminates the interesting point that many young Southerners, like Stipe, came to an appreciation of their home region and its culture via non-Southern, indeed non-American, British groups, like The Rolling Stones. This new Southern cultural movement, then, came about as a result of more than non-Southern/Southern cultural fusions, but as the product of cross-Atlantic cultural consumption and exchange.

After the trauma of the civil rights movement left many Southern whites feeling ashamed and hyper-aware of national stereotypes about Southern white racism (Kemp, 2004), this situation was only aggravated by the rapid devolution of the, initially, highly progressive Southern Rock movement of the 1970s (the Allman Brothers, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Marshall Chapman, early Marshall Tucker Band) into a bland, commercial parody of itself (.38 Special, Molly Hatchet, later Marshall Tucker

Band). The thriving mid-eighties indie network proved to a generation of young Southerners that the region was still fertile ground for musical experimentation and hybridization. These bands found a new, cheap, barebones way to draw on the richness and diversity of a highly miscegenated Southern culture and music. The 1985 one-year anniversary issue of Athens, Georgia's *Tasty World Magazine* proclaimed:

Not many people readily recognize the effect of jazz, ragtime, blues, bluegrass, country, folk, gospel, and R & B on the rock n' roll of recent years. The fact is, rock n' roll is a product of all these influences and the South has been proud to offer a fertile sanctuary in which these varied styles could grow. The South is, essentially, the birthplace of rock n' roll. (Cargo, 1985, p. 17)

Alt-Country

Following in R.E.M.'s footsteps, Uncle Tupelo from rural Belleville, Illinois, a suburb of St. Louis, Missouri, fronted by Jay Farrar and Jeff Tweedy, combined their own disparate "modern" and "traditional" influences. Their fusion of raw, early country and folk (Carter Family, Hank Williams, Woody Guthrie) with the start-stop punk intensity of the Minutemen created a sound that came to be called alt-country. Gram Parsons-era Byrds, and especially *Sweetheart of the Rodeo*, provided an early sonic model. Though not American, The Mekons, from Leeds, in the southern UK, deserve mention. They produced *Fear & Whiskey* (1985), frequently called the first alt-country album. Following an early 1980s identity crisis, The Mekons re-formed after the 1984 UK Miners' Strike to "sing about all kinds of collapse, from individual romances to whole economies" (Pareles, 1987). Uncle Tupelo, however, is widely considered the first true alt-country band. Their 1990 album *No Depression* took the name of a Carter Family standard, while the term "No Depression" became synonymous with alt-country when the genre's premier magazine adopted the name. Featuring a bed of traditional rock instrumentation—drums and electric guitar and bass guitar—the band overdubbed banjo, mandolin, fiddle, harmonica, acoustic and pedal steel guitars to create their country sounds.

The album and subsequent album covers emulated the simple, black and white photo look of early Folkways albums.

Thematically, the lyrics addressed the same topics of old country and blues: trials, troubles, poverty, broken dreams, the whiskey that washes it away and the death that will deliver a somewhat ambiguous “us” from these harsh realities. At the beginning of the 1990s, large-scale agriculture engulfed more and more of the rural Midwest, while urban areas experienced the decay of early de-industrialization. Uncle Tupelo gave voice to the anxiety of the American middle-class suburban experience, challenging the homogenous, prosperous image of American identity accepted by many: “Some say a land of paradise / Some say a land of pain / Well, which side are you looking from / Some people have it all / Some all to gain.” In America’s heartland, the destination of so many Appalachian migrants during the first half of the twentieth century, depression and disillusion now dwelt, no longer the sole provenance of the South. Tweedy and Farrar’s lyrics spoke plainly about the people and experiences in “out of the way” places. Like their musical idol and fellow Midwesterner Woody Guthrie, they gave voice to the desperate and crest-fallen victims of the daily grind and the unending road to an American prosperity that never came. Farrar and Tweedy sang about the complacent malaise that only alcohol and music could soothe, at least temporarily, in attempting to find a “life worth livin’”: “This song is sung for anyone that’s listening / This song is for the broken-spirited man / This song is for anyone left standing / After the strain of a slow, sad end” (Tweedy, Heidorn, & Farrar, 1990).

Nostalgic *and* defiant, Uncle Tupelo presented no localist, utopian visions. At the heart of their lament lay a recognition about the limits of localism. They conceded that poverty would likely continue in the Midwest, and expressed a common desire to escape the hometown blues that too often begin with claustrophobic frustration and end in spiritual, artistic, and individual stagnation. The first song on *No Depression*, “Graveyard Shift,” opened with the pessimistic: “Hometown, same town blues / Same old walls closing in” (Farrar, Tweedy, & Heidorn, 1990). Fusing a depiction of small

town life with hopeless, gritty depictions of American poverty, Uncle Tupelo's focus on social issues precluded a perception of the natural landscape as a field of inspiration. Bill Malone also commented that while alt-country emphasized the poverty that sometimes characterized rural existence and received prominence in old country songs, it was "hard for [alt-country performers] to sing about family" (Malone in Petrusich, 2008, p. 129). The lack of emphasis on kinship and family ties, a key component of Southern agrarian, and particularly Appalachian, social organization indicated ways that modernity had indelibly changed the American social experience by the early 1990s. Despite Uncle Tupelo's relatively short, four-album life span, the band's songwriting duo Jay Farrar and Jeff Tweedy achieved canonical Americana status. Farrar moved on to Son Volt and Tweedy to Wilco, perpetuating alt-country into the twenty-first century. Initially shunned by the mainstream for falling somewhere between country and grunge, Uncle Tupelo and subsequent Tweedy/Farrar projects have inspired many alt-country acts, including Gillian Welch, Steve Earle, Palace Brothers, Calexico, and Whiskeytown.

Artists like Will Oldham (KY), Iron & Wine (TX via SC and FL), Chan Marshall (FL via GA and NY), and Bill Callahan (TX via MD) kept the indie Americana torch burning through the 1990s and early 2000s. Not surprisingly, many of these artists have more complex engagements and understandings of the way Southern roots music related to contemporary America's popular music genres. Under the name Cat Power, Chan Marshall began making her stripped-down, punk-inspired, roots-infused music in Atlanta in the early 1990s before moving to New York City. She started taking her own music-making seriously after watching a performance by avant-garde saxophonist and composer Anthony Braxton. Her barebones original songs about love, sorrow, and longing as well as her very public bouts with alcoholism and depression possess very tangible connections to the songs she chooses to cover. As documents of her artistic process and musical trajectory, Cat Power has released entire albums featuring sparse interpretations of songs by Nina Simone, Michael Hurley, Lou

Reed, James Brown, Jessie Mae Hemphill, and Hank Williams, all infused with her own “Southern-fried sensuality” (Phillips, 2006, par. 6).

From Louisville, Kentucky, Will Oldham’s interest in old music began after playing the role of a young prophet in John Sayles’ *Matewan* (1987), about the famous West Virginia coal mine strike that led to the 1921 Battle of Blair Mountain (Sanneh, 2009). Since the early 1990s, Oldham has recorded his own brand of dark folk under the names Palace Brothers, Palace Music, Palace, and Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy. Oldham has also collaborated with Appalshop sound artist Brian Harnetty on an album entitled *Silent City* (2009), featuring “a mix of songs, instrumentals, and field recordings that are loosely centered around a small, rural town” (Harnetty, n.d.). Harnetty contacted Oldham as he poured through Berea College’s Appalachian sound archives while working on another project, *American Winter*, where he interwove his own music with Appalachian field recordings, emphasizing the “strange, unpredictable human interaction[s]” that often occur in the field, between collector/researcher and informant. Harnetty says he “‘kept hearing elements of Will Oldham’s voice in the old recordings’ and started corresponding with the singer” (Bell, 2009). Oldham lists everyone from Merle Haggard to Leonard Cohen to R. Kelly as inspirations, and has admitted being surprised when people kept describing his music as Southern, country, and Appalachian. While fascinated with Greil Marcus’s “old, weird America,” Oldham worked hard to avoid classification as either “old” or “weird.” Understanding that “‘old’ is merely a word for something that was once new and survived,” Oldham recognized that “weird” sets up an alternative/oppositional narrative trap, and preferred to think of his work as engaged with contemporary, popular song. That his music has been called “apocalyptic folk,” tells more about the dark specters lurking on America’s cultural horizon (Sanneh, 2009).

Another artist commonly given the “apocalyptic folk” tag, Ben Chasny (of Six Organs of Admittance) creates music from a perspective that “[e]verything’s kinda fucked, let’s write a song about it” (Beta, 2007, par. 1). His brand of acid folk could not be more different from Oldham’s.

Chasny's long, often home recorded compositions, incorporate more ethnically diverse influences, along with searing electric and acoustic guitar virtuosity, and highly spiritual, sometimes devotional subject matter, to provide an eerie soundtrack for "our generation's end-times" (par. 11). Chasny's darkly beautiful music attracted West Virginia-born, experimental filmmaker and documentarist Catherine Pancake. Her 2007 documentary *Black Diamonds* overlaid the ecstatic, mournful dronings of Six Organs of Admittance and the late Virginian guitarist Jack Rose over long shots of lifeless, mountaintop removal landscapes. Jack Rose began his career as the leader of the Philadelphia-based free-improv, drone collective, Pelt, frequently described as "the Hillbilly Theater of Eternal Music" (VHF Records, n.d).¹⁰ Inspired equally by the fingerpicking of John Fahey and Sam McGee, Indian classical music, and the free improvisation of the Grateful Dead; his country, blues, and ragtime virtuosity earned him the name Dr. Ragtime. A prolific recording artist, Rose left over twenty acoustic albums before his unexpected death in 2009.

Freak Folk

The first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed an Appalachian invasion of the indie music world. By 2004, headlines about something called "freak folk," "wyrd folk," and "nu folk" littered indie music blogs and magazines. That year, the Texas-born and half-Venezuelan Devendra Banhart released two critically acclaimed albums *Rejoicing in the Hands* and *Niño Rojo* on Michael Gira's (of legendary 80s noise rockers Swans) Young God Records. The golden-haired, Californian harp goddess Joanna Newsom released her equally beloved debut *Milk-Eyed Mender* on Chicago's Drag City. Both albums featured whimsical, stream-of-consciousness lyrical charm and idiosyncratic, simply structured, acoustic songs reeled from some pure well of weirdness and wonder. Banhart's lyrics vacillated between the intimate whisperings of "Sight to Behold" ("It's like finding a home / In

¹⁰ La Monte Young's Theatre of Eternal Music was an ongoing minimalist musical experiment utilizing an ever shifting cast of musicians to create marathon length drone compositions. It grew from its roots in the early 1960s Fluxus art movement into an actual theater/museum featuring permanent sound installations droning into eternity.

an old folk song / That you've never ever heard / Still you know every word / And for sure you can sing along") and shimmering psychedelic imagery in "Insect Eyes" ("And each strand of her hair is really insect eyes / And each hole in her tongue is always occupied by the milk of the sun / And each hair on her head is fields of gold wheat") (Banhart, 2004). Indie critics seemed equally tickled by Newsom's nimble, classically-trained fingers and her idiosyncratic vocal delivery of such imaginative musings as these first lines from "Bridges and Balloons": "We sailed away on a winter's day / With fate as malleable as clay / But ships are fallible, I say / And the nautical, like all things, fades, and I / Can recall our caravel / A little wicker beetle shell" (Newsom, 2004).

Dubbed the King and Queen of the new freak scene, the "Appalachian" tag came with the territory, and Newsom's Appalachian connection came relatively easily. *Milk-Eyed Mender* contained a single traditional song: Texas Gladden's version of the ballad "Three Little Babes" (variant of Child Ballad #78, "The Wife of Usher's Well"). In an interview with *Arthur*, Newsom recalled the way "time stopped" when she heard the Appalachian ballad singer perform for her American music class at Mills College. The "affecting" nature, unconventional beauty, and "comfort" of Gladden's voice inspired Newsom to sing her own songs. Newsom also admired composer Ruth Seeger, the oft forgotten Seeger family matriarch, whose experimentation with dissonance and brilliant arrangements of the Lomax's field recordings exhibit a "unique and rare intersection of art music and folk music. And an equal reverence, on her part, for preserving history and moving forward." The brilliant composer/arranger/lyricist Van Dyke Parks, who collaborated with Newsom on her 2006 album *Ys*, is another important influence. In the late 1960s, Parks' solo albums, along with his legendary contributions to Brian Wilson's masterpiece *Smile*, pioneered a highly psychedelic, collage approach to songform to suit the dazzling heterogeneity of Americana. Well versed in American musical traditions herself, Newsom claimed to be "mak[ing] music that somehow connect[ed] to the things that [she] love[d] in American music" (Babcock, 2004).

The perceived Appalachianness of Banhart's music appeared in reviews of his early albums, where glimpses of old blues and Celtic folk glittered in his songwriting and style. Through sometimes oblique lyrics, critics identified Banhart's "crooning ... like a lost Appalachian blues-master about love and death and daily existence" as evidence of his authenticity (Kelly, 2004, par. 2). In addition to emphasizing these tried and true Appalachian themes, freak folk's anointed leaders drew inspiration from the likes of "traditional" musicians like Blind Willie Johnson, Mississippi John Hurt and Elizabeth Cotten. Cited influences included a mix of American and British 1960s folk revivalists. From America, the Oklahoma-born, part-Cherokee, Greenwich Village banjo songstress Karen Dalton received attention, as did Bob Dylan, American primitive guitar pioneer John Fahey, and outsider folk songster Michael Hurley. Donovan, Incredible String Band, Vashti Bunyan and Bert Jansch (of Pentangle) represented the movement's British folk fascinations (O'hara, 2005; Bristow, 2003; Petrusich, 2008).

Banhart included bands like Vetiver (CA), Cocorosie (NY), Bunny Brains (CT), Feathers (VT), and Espers (PA), in what he called "the family," in response to his dislike of the term "freak folk" (Schroeder, 2005, par. 9). They appeared on the cover and as musical collaborators on his 2005 album *Cripple Crow*. By no means a centralized or cohesive scene, many bands across the nation fall under this alt-American freak flag. The track list of *The Golden Apples of the Sun* (2004), an *Arthur* magazine compilation of modern folk curated by Banhart, provides another logical starting place for uncovering more of the family tree: Antony and the Johnsons (NY), Jana Hunter (TX), Jack Rose (PA), Six Organs of Admittance (CA), Iron and Wine (TX), and Matt Valentine (VT). While absent on this particular compilation, the music of Sufjan Stevens (MI), Akron/Family (OR/NY), Bright Black Morning Light (CA via AL) and Animal Collective (NY) have all garnered freak folk status in the indie press. Never a truly unified scene or movement, these artists were mostly unwittingly pigeonholed as freak folk by music writers; and, many have survived the inevitable critical backlash

to achieve long-term popular and critical success through their highly individualistic and ever-changing approaches to music making.

The common threads that run through these bands dealt less with genre than with attitude, intention, and presentation. Band names and song lyrics evoked organic, earthy simplicity and utilized whimsical natural images of insects, animals, birds, bees, feathers, shells, rocks, mountains, and ocean. Album art merged old with new to create a romantic, out-of-time dreamscape. Acid Americana collages, enigmatic and intricate etchings, fanciful and wavy creatures, crystalline shapes, imperfect stitches, buttons, beads, and sprinklings of other antiquarian ephemera created a simple and quirky authenticity. Newsom flirted with a romantic medievalism in the painted portrait of her gracing the cover of her second album *Ys* (2006), while Banhart and “family” have appropriated a mishmash of AmerIndian signifiers, posing in feathered headdresses, fur caps, long, unkempt hair, lots of beards, and psychedelic face paint (Crazy Horse, 2007).

Rock journalist Kandia Crazy Horse painted a less rosy picture of the new freak scene. She criticized its lack of political engagement and insisted that it only paid lip service to collectivist values of family and kinship. The enthusiastic excavation of the weirdest images and sounds from America’s menagerie of invisible and oppressed “others” (from African and Native American, Hispanic, and Appalachian folk cultural spheres) ignored the contemporary race and class-based issues plaguing the nation. She contended that freak folk continued a long tradition of white cultural imperialism that diminished and tokenized the contributions of artists of color in “pursuit of tribal tabula rasa ... the self-renewing agency to achieve cultural purity by denying whatever dark obstacles should dare to present themselves on the nation’s stage” (Crazy Horse, 2007, par. 6). The freak folk phenomenon mirrored a growing post-9/11 anxiety about an impending white minority status in America’s increasingly multi-ethnic demographic landscape. Pointing out the general whiteness of its participants, Crazy Horse asserted that this “aesthetic gated community” emerged as a byproduct of American racism and fear. Blaming those engaged in the valuable work of unearthing the contents of

their creative psyches and reflecting the subterranean hopes and fears of their times only goes so far, however. A more nuanced understanding of how and why this musical movement emerged requires an even broader historical context.

New Weird America and Beyond

Moving beyond freak folk's candy-coated, West-coast colored veneer, one must examine the more obscure branches and deeper roots of a wider phenomenon called the New Weird America (NWA). Scottish music journalist David Keenan's article "Welcome to the New Weird America" published in the August 2003 issue of *The Wire*, a British music magazine documenting "adventures in modern music," used the term to describe the disparate sounds heard at the first and only Brattleboro (Vermont) Free Folk Festival. The term is borrowed from rock critic Greil Marcus's use of "old, weird, America" to describe the unearthly country, blues and folk sounds featured in the three volume *Anthology of American Folk Music* compiled by amateur anthropologist, collector, filmmaker, and mystic Harry Smith (Keenan, 2003, p. 32-41). Originally released on Folkways Records in 1952, the *Anthology* became a touchstone for much of the 1960s folk revival, its eerie sounds becoming particularly salient on Bob Dylan's *Basement Tapes* (Marcus, 1997). "New Weird America" acknowledged the Appalachian/rural "folk" lineage of these modern free folkers, while also exposing the countercultural and New Age underpinnings of the movement. However, the term still obscured the "freer" influences of this new music.

Festival organizer Matt Valentine (of psych free folk groups MV + EE and The Tower Recordings) used "free folk" to describe a slew of primarily New England-based bands working to break free of the formulaic strictures of the folk idiom. In an interview with music journalist Amanda Petrusich, Valentine's "free folk" definition remained simple and vague: "avant-garde meets acoustic music" (2008, p. 250). The Massachusetts-based collective Sunburned Hand of the Man graced the sun-drenched cover photo of *The Wire*'s "New Weird America" issue, and temporarily became the poster collective for the burgeoning revival until 2004's freak folk bomb hit. A shadowy hand reached

through the trees behind nine only slightly unkempt, fairly normal, suburban-looking guys in jeans and button-down cowboy shirts. Sporting only a couple beards, two sets of bare feet, and one set of overalls, the band looked casual in their awkward stances around a stone fire circle. In addition to Sunburned, the festival's lineup included Six Organs of Admittance, Charalambides, Jack Rose, Son of Earth, and Action Trio (Sonic Youth's Thurston Moore joined by tenor saxophonist Paul Flaherty and free jazz drummer Chris Corsano). The festival's official website has remained online with this description: "the CHILD OF MICROTONES and SPIRIT OF ORR warmly welcomes all to a long day dedicated to peace and mental wandering with some of our favorite musical messengers" (Brattleboro free folk fest, 2003).

These free folk acts don't belong to a single genre, but share a common spirit. Taken together, they invoke "an intoxicating range of avant-garde sounds, from acoustic roots to drone, ritualistic performance, Krautrock, ecstatic jazz, hillbilly mountain music, psychedelia, archival blues and folk sides, Country funk, and more" (Keenan, 2003, p. 32). More than folk authenticity or weirdness, improvisation lies at the heart of free folk. Music writer Byron Coley dismissed the notion that the NWA represented a continuation of any sort of folk tradition. He believed it more useful to understand the movement and its eclecticism as a product of open-minded, roots-seeking, record collecting musicians attempting "creations and re-creations of folk tradition" (Petrusich, 2008, p. 246). He later reflected that "[t]here's a connective tissue having to do with a ... certain kind of creation, spontaneity, and community, revolving equally around performance and documentation" (Coley, 2009, par. 3). NWA has many godfathers, including Birmingham-born, free jazz composer and intergalactic philosopher/poet Sun Ra, and microtonal, experimental composer and instrument-maker Harry Partsch. Coley, however, presented guitarist John Fahey as the movement's chief figurehead.

An obsessive collector and lover of everything from early bluegrass and blues to Indian classical music, Fahey (1966) became one of the earliest scholars of Mississippi bluesman Charley

Patton before starting Takoma Records in the 1960s. In the 1990s, he started Revenant Records, compiling and releasing a series of seminal collections of early American folk music.¹¹ His pioneering guitar compositions and improvisations mixed the exploratory spirit of Indian raga, traditional American folk rhythms and melodies, and the extreme dissonance of avant-garde art music, earning him a devoted “legion of free improvisers and noise musicians” in the 1990s before his death in 2001 (Coley, 2009, par. 4). In a booklet accompanying a VHS featuring interviews and performances of John Fahey and Chapel Hill-born fingerpicking blues guitarist, songwriter, and banjo player Elizabeth Cotten appearing on Laura Weber’s *GUITAR, GUITAR* television program in 1969, Fahey is described as “the ‘paterfamilias’ of an approach to the guitar which did not exist before him” (Humphrey, 1994, p. 5). The video also presents a wonderful example of the irreverent attitude that baffled many in the folk music world at the time, and earned him many punk devotees years later. Humphrey remarks:

It’s evident Weber admires Fahey without knowing quite what to make of him (or do with him), and she was not the last to be thus flummoxed. We see Fahey using an antique Hawaiian guitar for an ashtray and impishly correcting Weber’s use of musical terminology while denying any schooling to back up such a correction (in fact, he had a masters [*sic*] degree in Folklore & Mythology from UCLA). He appears to shrug off the uniqueness of what he’s doing, yet at the same time is quite sure of what he’s up to. His was neither a “show business” attitude nor a conventional “folky” one; it offered an audience little comfort in coming to terms with Fahey. His onetime Takoma label partner, Ed Denson, described the conundrum to Dale Miller in an *Acoustic Guitar* magazine feature: “The difficulty was that he was making what you have to call ‘serious’ music and presenting it, well, almost as a punk

¹¹ Revenant’s catalog includes the seven CD Charley Patton box set *Screamin’ and Hollerin’ the Blues* (2001), featuring historical and biographical notes by Fahey and musicologist Dick Spottswood. Dedicated to the memory of John Fahey and released by Revenant shortly after his death, the collection also contains Fahey’s entire Master’s thesis on Patton.

rocker. He would be on stage drinking these large bottles of Coca-Cola and stopping in the middle of the piece to smoke a cigarette.” (p. 5-6)

Directly involved in the 1960s rediscoveries of pre-War Mississippi delta blues greats Booker White and Skip James, Fahey’s innovative style would influence guitarists, like Robbie Basho, Peter Lang, and Leo Kottke, as well as, much to his consternation, even more derivative New Age guitarists.¹² In the late twentieth century and, especially, after his death, Fahey’s musical legacy has grown, and many agree with Humphrey’s (1994) assessment that

Fahey belongs to the exclusive ranks of quintessentially American eccentric musical geniuses in which you find such disparate characters as Charles Ives, Harry Partsch, John Cage, and Frank Zappa. Like them, Fahey had a unique musical vision, and a single-minded goal: To get the steel-string guitar recognized as a legitimate concert instrument. His realization of that goal, however unorthodox, posed challenges and created opportunities for all subsequent steel-string guitar soloists. (p. 9)

Like Fahey, many New Weird American artists tend to be avid record collectors with eclectic music tastes, forging new musical fusions and creative distillations of an American musical landscape that now includes electronic synthesizers and Southern rap as much as old country and blues. Most NWA musicians do not purport to be bearers of some static, unadulterated folk tradition. Their musical “authenticity” derives from an ability to access the improvisatory spontaneity at the movement’s heart (Animal My Soul, 2008). As the literal children of the 1960s and 1970s back-to-the-landers, many have learned about “traditional” music and values through their parent’s lifestyles and record collections. This new roots movement resulted from a late twentieth century American multiculturalist project that expanded appreciation and understanding of Appalachian and, more

¹² Fahey wrote humorous anecdotes about White and James in *How Bluegrass Music Destroyed My Life: Stories* (2000), where he also offers biting criticisms about Berkeley’s hypocritical 1960s folk scene and delivers some irreverent insights into the American folk revival, more generally.

generally, Southern rural culture. It emerged in part because of university classes and academic publications on Southern folk culture, folk camps and festivals that have extolled and exposed the value of “traditional” American roots music since the folk revival of the 1960s.

Conclusion

At the end of the first decade of the twenty-first century, freak folk and free folk, alike, increasingly fall under the broader, more innocuous “indie-folk” catchall. Many artists and bands who do little more than tote a banjo, fiddle, or play acoustic guitar music have unwittingly received the Appalachian label. Others who make no attempt to explore rural, Southern music traditions or culture nevertheless intentionally or unintentionally appropriate such an identity by evoking specific country images, sounds, or styles. Since 1980, the negotiation of Appalachian identity in American indie music closely mirrored American pop culture’s perception of Appalachia and the South, in general.

Through the 1980s, American indie music struggled to present positive representations of the South’s cultural heritage. Many Southern bands enacted a pilgrimage narrative to find creative inspiration in an ominous but mystical Southern landscape. Directly responding to post-1960s national stereotypes about Southern white racism, these bands emphasized the redeeming aspects of a diverse and dynamic Southern culture and music, recognizing the contributions these have made to the broader American cultural landscape. Reacting to homogenous images of Western modernity and American prosperity, others exposed the persistent poverty of an increasingly post-industrial nation, expressed the boredom of suburban, middle-class existence, and sought life’s hard but soothing truths in old country and blues. During the past decade, a specifically Appalachian identity explosion occurred within indie music. At long last, America’s music underground enthusiastically embraced some aspects of Southern identity, even if it remained a predominantly white, romantic folk association. Once again, this new, weird folk revival responded to larger anxieties and rapid social changes taking place throughout the nation. In the first decade of the new millennium, the American psyche experienced the trauma of the September 11, 2001 terror attacks, America’s escalating

military pursuits in the Middle East, economic stagnation, growing xenophobia related to impending white minority status at home, and the decline of American influence and regard world-wide. For all the above reasons, many young Americans clung to the nostalgic, romantic trappings of an authentic and still virtuous, white-washed Southern folk identity. While American indie musicians continued to perform various aspects of Appalachian and Southern identity, most rightly denied that they or their music represented a continuation of a lost folk culture or worldview. Many attempted to channel the elusive, affecting spirit of old country, gospel, and blues while maintaining an awareness of the modern condition and a vigilant wariness about merely replicating the past.

Much work remains in expanding both popular and scholarly notions about Appalachian music. Social scientists and scholars have largely ignored the culture of Appalachian towns and cities that conflict with persisting stereotypes of Appalachian rurality. The music made in the mountain region is much more diverse than what has traditionally passed for Appalachian music. Furthermore, many Appalachian-born musicians operate within the indie music circuit and apply the term “indie” to their own music. For example, the native Appalachian Virginia sister duo Rising Appalachia, now operating as a New Orleans-based music collective, fuse familiar Appalachian banjo and fiddle sounds with popular black music genres. They use “indie” as one descriptor of their music and perform songs about the social alienation and material excesses of modern American culture (Rising Appalachia, n.d.). The downtown scenes of urban Appalachian cities have also produced native punk and rock bands like Morgantown, West Virginia’s Appalachian Terror Unit. Friends of such anti-strip mining organizations as Coal River Mountain Watch, the band has publicized the contentious issue of mountain top removal in their region, posting pictures of mountain top removal operations on their MySpace page. While using the apocalyptic imagery and twisted humor appropriate to their hardcore metal punk music, they also scream anarchic incantations of empowerment like these lyrics from “Let’s Take the Fight to Them”: “Thou shall not be a victim / thou shall not be a perpetrator / and above all else / thou shall not be a bystander” (Appalachian Terror Unit, n.d.).

Understanding the way other oppositional cultural movements have used Appalachian and Southern identity allows for a more in-depth understanding of how a highly networked, increasingly multicultural contemporary America is beginning to understand its own complex identity. In a time when singular images and visions of prosperity no longer hold, America looks, again, into its Southern mirror for cues about how it ought to redefine itself in this new century. Appalachian and Southern Studies has an opportunity to use another Appalachian rediscovery to explore new connections, linkages, and overlaps between regional, ethnic, national, and global identities with similarly dissonant relationships to any representation of a culturally homogenous America. Appalachian identity can no longer be confined to a regional, ethnic, or even national framework. People the world over continue to discover in the old sounds of Appalachia and the American South a compelling, unifying spirit. Like modern underground musicians experimentally fusing old hillbilly music with Indian classical drones, those who freely appropriate Appalachian elements are creating new frameworks for bridging cultural differences and illuminating the shimmering tapestry of complexity and dissonance that increasingly defines a burgeoning global culture.

CHAPTER FOUR

A History of Boone, North Carolina's Alternative Music Scenes: 1979-early 2000s

In January 1978 the Sex Pistols arrived in the United States for their first (and last) American tour. Inverting music industry conventions dictating how one managed a commercially successful rock band, Pistols' svengali Malcolm McLaren, ever the antagonistic trickster, booked a trans-Southern tour. The Sex Pistols bypassed the Northeastern cities where the band would have received sure acceptance, if not ecstatic approval. Instead, they embarked on a tour that began in an Atlanta cowboy bar, rolled through Texas, and ended, fatally, in San Francisco. From a small town in southwestern North Carolina, Allan Duncan read about Britain's punk explosion in fanzines and popular music magazines, like *Rolling Stone* and *Creem*, and tuned in to watch ABC news report, from Atlanta, the public outrage over the Sex Pistols' North American debut.¹³ Born and raised in Hendersonville, the same mountain town where his parents grew up, a couple short years would find Allan in Boone, North Carolina, an English major at Appalachian State University, and the drummer for one of Boone's first punk bands: The Opposition (A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011).

Boone's First Punk Wave: 1979-1983

Thirty years later, Allan recalled that Boone's first punk wave "came together in a very honest way" as a result of bottled up energy unleashing itself at the end of a long, snowy High

¹³ In retrospect, Allan laughs about the irony of this public response. His initial impression of the Sex Pistols was unfavorable because he thought they "sounded like KISS" and did not really possess the anti-commercial and radical spirit that would characterize punk as it evolved into the 1980s, especially as it spread from the urban to rural parts of the American landscape. Kevin Freeman also called the Sex Pistols "pretty tame" compared to even some of their proto-punk influences, like the New York Dolls, Detroit's MC5, and The Stooges, of Ann Arbor, MI, as well as post-punk successors.

Country winter. Where winter meant boredom, cabin fever, and creative gestation, spring called for frenzied celebration and activity. When spring 1981 came around, Allan heard about a punk band looking for a drummer. Having already developed his drumming skills through his high school's band and cultivated, with a small group of hometown friends, a love of British punk, Allan joined up. In doing so, he entered a larger local network of young people, mostly Appalachian State University (ASU) students, forming punk-inspired bands in Boone around the same time: Red Plastic Gun, The Othermothers, Gangrene LTD, The Right Profile, and Three Hits (and a Miss).

Even The Right Profile, the most pop sounding, widely appealing, and somewhat anomalous band in this scene, drew inspiration from The Clash (Groce, n.d.).¹⁴ Early British punks performed fresh, challenging rock music with a message that spoke directly to bored, working-class youth in Britain and abroad. Not only did punk successfully create an inspiring anti-commercial, artistically anarchic message, as individuals acted on and negotiated these meanings, propelling punk into the more rural areas of the United States, punk evolved through further articulation:

The Sex Pistols, The Clash, The English groups, a lot of that came from really kids that were bored and with no jobs, and sort of lower-income life. I think that fueled a lot of sort of the punk backlash at the time. All the rock stars we had admired growing up had become rich and bloated it seemed to us at the time. We were listening to things like [Lynyrd] Skynyrd and [Led] Zeppelin and the [Rolling] Stones; and, then suddenly, you could do it yourself. That was the whole sort of message we got out of the punks. Then we found ourselves in Boone trying to pull it off, too. (A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011)

¹⁴ In addition to covering Clash songs, The Right Profile took their name from a humorous Clash song about celebrity and catching a glimpse of Montgomery Clift's right profile. Gangrene LTD added to the Boone emphasis on British punk with a name that seems to simultaneously reference Public Image Limited (the band John Lyden, aka Johnny Rotten, formed after the breakup of the Sex Pistols) and Gang of Four (whose own name derived from a political faction within the Chinese Communist Party).

Do-it-yourself (DIY) became the mantra of the punk-fueled creation of an American independent music underground. It encouraged diverse forms of novice participation and advocated learning through doing. In seeking to maximize participant interaction and blur the lines between creation and consumption, punk also obliterated the traditional rules of performance, and especially the boundaries between performer and audience. This philosophy implied that one need not even wield an instrument or seek opportunities for public performance in order to achieve legitimate participant status. Recently, Eric Bolash (2008), vocalist from The Dead Wives of Jerry Lee Lewis (1988), specifically recalled what this opening up of musical possibility meant for him and his group of friends:

Those of us who were into joyfully experimental, funny, angry, ugly, fuzzy, ridiculous music felt like if you wanted to, you could start a band and be in a band or think about being in a band or think about going to see a band or think about where you'd get the money to buy the next record from one of these bands. We had unapologetically one-track minds.

What could be more democratic than this? A love of music and the will to harness enough childlike abandon to experiment with channeling one's emotions and thoughts via the medium of sound presented the only requirements for meaningful participation in the punk community.

The Dead Wives of Jerry Lee Lewis provide the perfect example of meaningful practice divorced from the necessity of public performance. The band never played live and would not, by some people's standards, warrant consideration as a "real" band." Thanks to recording technology and now the Internet, however, a single mp3 of one basement performance does exist as part of Boone's music history, making them as real as any band from the time. I play the lone recording, "Sometimes Good Guys Don't Wear White," and listen for the stories that always lie behind the artifice of musical performances. I try to envision who these people must have been and to locate the whys and wherefores of this creation. Bolash's written remembrances, of course, aid my imaginary recreation:

I hear the smiles on our faces. I can see Jamie and Scott pounding their aged, beat up hollow-body guitars, which fed back with a beautifully terrible moan between songs while we practiced. I remember catching a ride from them out of Boone to the house where we practiced. On the way to practice, we rode through cold, quiet, foggy, snow-dusted mountain roads. I remember trying to scream above the distortion into the mic with song lyrics taped to a weight-bearing pole in the basement where we practiced. I remember my throat aching in the most awesome way from screaming into the mic. I remember wearing the most absurd clothing I could devise and not caring. ... I remember my ears ringing when we exited the cold, quiet night ... The Dead Wives never played live. So, you could say we weren't really a band. That's pretty much true. Then again, making some inventive loud music just because it made you smile had its own kind of value.

Though the bands in Boone's first punk wave differed in terms of sound and influence, the online Boone Music Archive, documenting Boone's eighties music underground, indicate most labeled themselves "punk," a linguistic indicator of the type of anti-commercial and politically relevant rock music its participants performed. Individual empowerment, community orientation and a creative, engaged disengagement produced a true counterculture of expression. Creating music was highly personal, emphasizing individual ability and choice as well as constructive social interaction. Involvement in a culture of doing "made you smile" and, therefore, possessed value in and of itself. Such action rested on an idea that opening up spaces for creative expression, if not on any grander a scale than a group of friends coming together to make noise in a basement, could be radical. That mainstream society did not value such grassroots engagement further indicated reasons for participating in such activity. Allan summed up the relationship between music and action this way: "Those of us who were interested in the music were looking for opportunities to play and we hooked up together and did what we did" (A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011).

For those who performed more extensively and attempted to make a living playing music, reality tempered these good memories as well as the meanings of engagement. Stephen Dubner attended ASU during the early eighties before he became a journalist and eventual co-author of the best-selling *Freakonomics: A Rogue Economist Explores the Hidden Side of Everything* (2005). During his time in Boone, he played piano and wrote songs for The Right Profile. Because of their regional popularity and brief taste of potentially wider success, the band stuck it out for an impressive seven years (1981-1988), through several drummers and recording sessions that went nowhere. He later called the experience of band life “grueling,” and likened it to “being married to four people at the same time” (2003, p. 4). Elsewhere, Dubner (1998) described the long-term commitment to living and performing with the band as akin to family life:

Like a family, we quarreled and scrapped for attention, but we were bound by a common pursuit and attacked it with a singleness of vision. ... We practically lived in our van, a tribe of desperate troubadours, waiting to be beckoned into the big time. (p. 162-163)

Like so many underground eighties bands, The Right Profile saw the burgeoning indie music circuit as a stepping stone to more mainstream music “success,” necessarily involving the major-label promotion and distribution structures of America’s commercial music industry. These capitulatory ambitions coupled with the belief that the band could successfully avoid outside pressures to mold their sound and image ultimately led to the band’s demise. By the time the “big break” happened, the soul mate relationship with co-frontman Jeffrey Dean Foster began to sour over minor perceived insults and the potential over-representation of one songwriter’s voice on a debut album that never emerged.

GanGreene LTD emerged as another important group in Boone’s first punk wave. While they eventually went as far as recording in London and touring Europe, the band formed mostly as a bunch of amateurs with varying degrees of musical experience and competence. The group’s guitar player began playing after fatefully finding a Fender Stratocaster in a Boone dumpster. The DIY, learn-as-

you-go ethos created a unique relational experience between band and audience, especially during GanGreene's early performances. According to Glen Tig (n.d.), GanGreene's Farfisa organ player:

Audiences that didn't hate us usually developed affection for us. How could they help it? We needed them, rooting for us, praying that Dave could find a way down from his guitar riffs, hoping Derek and Benjamin could hang onto the tempo and that my Farfisa fingers would find more right keys than wrong ones (par. 14).

Although the players of Boone's earliest punk scene emphasized enthusiasm and intention over musical experience or instrumental competence as part and parcel of an authentic punk spirit, spectating audience members sometimes had other expectations. This tension proved so great that Derek (n.d.), GanGreene's novice drummer, felt a need to publicly explain his actions and express his philosophy in words. In doing so, he laid bare the meanings and intentions behind punk practice and performance:

So I have limited skills as a drummer, but I never said I play the drums. I play the drummer. That may require limited skill, but it takes a lot of nerve to sit there and bash it out under the burning lights and the critical eyes of the public. ...All I'm saying is I'm at least a doer and I'm doing it better by doing.

The emergence of a punk scene in Boone would probably not have happened without the musical and ideological models provided by British and American punks¹⁵. Young kids in as supposedly peripheral places as southern Appalachia could see performances of this new, challenging rock 'n' roll on the television. More likely, though, they entered the figured world of punk via glossy, high-circulation music magazines or less professional, mail-order fanzines. In their pages, one could learn about the music, the styles, and the multiple, evolving meanings of punk. Discouraging passive consumerism, the enduring significance of the punk movement lay in its DIY ethos and insistence

¹⁵ The Ramones reigned as representatives of New York punk, while Allan Duncan remembers his Opposition band mates digging L.A. punk bands, like X and Black Flag.

that participants become active, in whatever way possible, in challenging dominant social structures and enacting positive change in their local communities. More immediate than the mediated, emerging worlds of punk, the historical, cultural, and natural characteristics of local community structures both enabled and inhibited the practice of punk community in Boone during the early 1980s.

At the beginning of the decade, ASU's student population hovered near ten thousand; and, the 1979-1980 ASU Factbook described the area as "still relatively undeveloped and unspoiled." (Appalachian State University, 1980; Boone Music Archive, 2006). The town's first fast-food restaurant had just been built on Blowing Rock Road, where a Hardee's now sits. Geography and climate also played catalyzing roles in incubating and inspiring local bands at a time when ASU's smaller size meant a more differentiated divide between Town and University. Jeffrey Dean Foster (n.d.) described Boone of the early 1980s as "the void from which my inexperienced and enthusiastic band was hurled." Bandmate Stephen Dubner (1989) described the various groups populating ASU's social scene at the time:

There were three types of student: the well-dressed children of textile and tobacco executives, often blond, with plenty of money for Duke or Wake Forest but insufficient grades or a pressing desire to spend their college years piloting a BMW from one mountaintop keg party to the next; the well-behaved children of southern Christians, often Baptists, who would study elementary education or chorale music or forestry, meet a like-minded future spouse, and return four years later to Mount Airy or Raleigh to lead the same carefully constructed lives their parents had led; and the well-read children of teachers and southern intellectuals, often stoned, who quoted Flannery O'Connor and Woody Allen and listened to Lynyrd Skynyrd (but with ironic detachment) and who boasted no discernible future plans. It was with this third group, a slim minority that I fell in with. Schoolwork was at best our second priority; we

were too busy gently expanding our minds, whether watching *Citizen Kane* for the fourteenth time or climbing a mountain to gaze down on the classes we were cutting. (p. 148-149)

Because the town of Boone prohibited the sale of alcohol until March 1986, the majority the Boone punk scene prior to this year happened either on-campus or in Blowing Rock, where restaurants and bars did sell alcohol (Appalachian State University, n.d.)¹⁶. Traversing the eight miles of curvy, often foggy, mountain road to Blowing Rock presented the only option for ASU students and bands wanting to drink while hearing or playing live music. For a period in the late 1970s and early 1980s, Blowing Rock also boasted P.B. Scott's Music Hall, complete with a "wooden geodesic dome over the custom-made Boss sound system" (Brewer, 2006, par. 1). The venue closed in 1983, after a protracted battle with the town of Blowing Rock over alcohol sale, but

like any other you-had-to-be-there kind of place, the stories grow more legendary each year.

... Gregg Allman, B.B. King, John Prine, Leon Russell, R.E.M., Hank Williams Jr., Bonnie Rait, and Muddy Watters, among many others, once traveled hundreds of miles to play a venue in Blowing Rock.¹⁷ (par. 5)

Between such national acts, local and regional party bands, touring a "southern club circuit" that still exists today, played. Allan called this Southern rock circuit the "good ol' boys and their network," a scene distinct, though sometimes connected, to what he called the "local mountain scene." Allan speculated that, given a few years, some intermingling might have happened between these two scenes and the emerging punk scene, given a few years. For the most part, though, he

¹⁶ In March 1986 local voters approved a referendum allowing the sale of beer in Boone, overturning a legal prohibition in place since 1949. On the same day, Blowing Rock approved the sale of mixed drinks at restaurants and bars. Boone's restaurants and bars began serving beer and wine in April of 1986. Boone restaurants and bars did not begin serving mixed drinks until August 2008.

¹⁷ A "Remembering P.B. Scott's Music Hall in Blowing Rock" Facebook page exists. The page features over 1,500 members and many stories about the venue's famed Halloween parties ("What Mardi Gras is to New Orleans and St. Patrick's Day to Savannah, that's what Halloween was to Blowing Rock" former owner Randy Kelly once said) and shows. Canyons (formerly Holly's Tavern) now hosts an annual P.B. Scott's reunion party every spring.

remembered Boone's punk scene existing apart from these more regionally-rooted music networks (A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011). The Right Profile, performing more countrified rock than their punk peers, played regularly in such "roadhouses" throughout the South and recalled an instance where the audience rained empty beer bottles upon the horrified band to signal their approval (Dubner, 1998, p. 153).

Not only did punk attempt to steer clear of such regionalized associations, it also rose in partial opposition to another facet of party culture, entering the American music landscape at the tail end of a national disco craze. Allan remembered:

There was Holly's Tavern, ... a place called Mother Fletcher's and a place called Shenanigans. These places were old discotheques, if you can envision that. And, it was the mountain version. Disco, of course, was huge at the time. So, by the mid-1970s, here, if you had a bar, you had disco music, you had a dance floor. But the dance floors were tiny. The space was incredibly small. It was like playing in a mine shaft. (A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011)

Boone punk bands mostly played small, local bars and other locations, squeezing into basements, shoddily built shacks, even an unused barn. Any place that could temporarily turn into a hang-out or performance space was fair game.

Participants also pursued opportunities to play within the structures of the University community and using ASU's facilities. On March 27, 1982, The Othermothers and The Opposition played a nuclear disarmament benefit show featuring "other musical and literary guests" and faculty speaker, Dr. Brian Benett, from the anthropology department. The student union had "The Pub," Farthing Auditorium, and in the middle of the decade ASU built H'Appys, a university-owned nightclub for students (Boone Music Archive, 2006; Ashford, 2004). Several shows closer to campus and in Boone also took place at fraternity parties and other house shows (Boone Music Archive, 2006; Dubner, 1998).

This first wave of Boone punk bands actively engaged in building a regional network of outposts across the state. They played venues in other North Carolina cities, like Ziggy's in Winston-Salem, Friday's in Greensboro, and Charlotte's famous Milestone. Allan remembered these raucous out-of-town shows attracting slam-dancing high school football players and suburban "preps." Not coincidentally, Boone's first punk wave coincided with a national and regional music movement that Godfrey Cheshire (2000) called "the most exciting, creative and underappreciated period in American pop music, rock 'n' roll division." For Cheshire, the period between 1978 and 1985 saw an explosion of "smart, exuberant and incredibly eclectic pop-rock ... at the grassroots level all over the United States, from Austin and Minneapolis to Raleigh and Chapel Hill (par. 5).

Living in the Research Triangle and writing for the local magazine, *Spectator*, at the time, Cheshire followed what he perceived as a distinctly North Carolina slant to a national, grassroots music movement. In 1985, he released *Greetings from Comboland*, a three-cassette compilation featuring the diverse sounds of North Carolina acts such as Th' Cigaretz, Arrogance, Flat Duo Jets, Southern Culture on the Skids, The Right Profile, Fetchin' Bones, and The Othermothers. The release sparked some corporate interest and resulted in a BBC documentary about Comboland as well as the release of the more condensed *Welcome to Comboland* compilation on the British indie label, Making Waves (pars. 18-19).¹⁸ The wide appeal of alternative, grassroots sounds even reached Boone where, as Allan recalls, The Opposition played a couple fraternity parties and regularly saw ASU rugby players at shows, creating a blurring of boundaries between the prep and punk crowds.

¹⁸ Cheshire (2000) credits Mitch Easter "and his hipster vocabulary" for coining the term "Comboland" in reference to the North Carolina rock 'n' roll ferment of the 1980s. A "multi-talented instigator," Easter fronted the band Let's Active and ran the now legendary Drive-In recording studio, in Winston-Salem, where he produced some of R.E.M.'s early recordings as well as the jangly pop sounds of The dBs. From Winston-Salem, the dB's bassist, Chris Stamey, played with Box Tops/Big Star Memphis guitarist, songwriter and producer Alex Chilton while in New York during the late 1970s. The band's 1981 debut, *Stands for Decibels*, remains a classic power pop album, influencing many bands of the era, including R.E.M.

Mostly, though, Allan recalled the scene being tight-knit and “very much like any other local scene where we would all go see each other’s gigs and then we had this core group that followed primarily one band, maybe, but went to most of the gigs.” Friendships also helped a band land gigs. The Opposition played many gigs opening for The Othermothers because guys in the two bands were friends. Other than friendship, Allan admitted that drugs played an especially prominent role in bonding the scene’s musicians. While alcohol, at the time legally available to anyone nineteen and older, remained his drug of choice, many musicians used cocaine and heroin, when both remained highly romanticized in popular culture. Marijuana and psychedelics also maintained influential presence (A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011). On the other hand, some bands, like The Right Profile, remained “straight arrows” who “rarely drank” and “had never smoked pot” (Dubner, 1998, p. 132).

Intoxicants aside, diverse individual backgrounds and experiences also contributed to differences between and within bands, adding to the vibrancy of the scene. Allan was the only native Appalachian in The Opposition. The band’s lead singer hailed from New Jersey and his other band mates came from Greensboro and Charlotte. The Right Profile’s Jeffrey Dean Foster grew up in Winston-Salem, while Stephen Dubner arrived in Boone via the rural countryside of upstate New York (Dubner, 1998). Though not much is known about Red Plastic Gun, “most of the members were locals who had attended Watauga High School and... drove around and lived in an old school bus and played songs with a lean towards political and social content” (Boone Music Archive, 2006).

Where additional portraits of individual players remain, differences of musical preferences and engagement within the larger world of punk also emerge. While some loved British punk and others appreciated more homegrown variants, GanGreene’s influences extended beyond American and British music. The band’s cosmopolitan cast consisted of “French ski-instructor Benjamin Marcellin,” “Connecticut Yankee Dave Link Darrah,” “Australian mega-rock-star-to-be” David Faulkner,

homesick-for-the-big-city, New Yorker Glen Tig, and, occasionally, Japanese-American guitarist Jim Downs. Glen (n.d.) tells the story of GanGreene's birth this way:

While sampling [Glen's] crêpe, Benjamin muttered, 'Plastique Bertrand.' Not believing his ears, Glen responded, 'Lizzy Mercier Descloux.' In all likelihood, no one else in Boone (or western NC) would have known the names of those two obscure French musicians. But for Glen & Benjamin, it was a conversation in code. Punk code. (par. 4)

After GanGreene's breakup on a European tour, Dave and Benjamin returned to Boone and continued to influence the local scene with their international music experiences. Inspired by bands they saw in Amsterdam, they formed G-Force, a short-lived side project incorporating post-punk experimentations with drum machines and the sounds of Jamaican dub and reggae. They even make a painful attempt at rapping on a region-referencing song called "Mountain Dew": "You drink it down, you go to the moon. / ... You never need another high. / It's the best shit that you can buy. Yeah."

While Boone's punk and post-punk outfits looked to New York, the West Coast, Europe, and, eventually, other parts of the world for musical inspiration, Allan did not recall any overtly Southern influences in Boone's first crop of punk bands. Explaining his own experience, Allan explained:

I grew up hearing country music... so by the time I got to be a teenager, country music wasn't... what I spent my money on. In a way, I'm a product of the mountains. It's in my blood, but when you come from a culture, you don't necessarily chase down that culture. (A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011)

DD Thornton (2005), a former WFDD Deaconlight DJ, recalled differently.¹⁹ The first time she saw The Right Profile, she thought of them as "modern," but with,

¹⁹ WFDD (Wake Forest Demon Deacons), owned by Wake Forest University, is a National Public Radio Station out of Winston-Salem. From the late 1970s until 1981, DD Thornton hosted the popular student music program *Deaconlight*. Recently, music writer and Option Magazine editor, Mark Kemp (2010), wrote about DD's enormous influence on him and so many other music lovers in western and central North Carolina, introducing listeners to the likes of Elvis Costello, Devo, The Ramones, Television, XTC and more.

a lot of roots rock to their music. The singer/guitarist was this blonde dude wearing a bandana – red, I think – around his neck. More cowboy than punk. They also had a guy playing piano, which you didn’t see much at punk shows. At times I felt like I was at a Springsteen concert.

(par. 6)

But, again, The Right Profile existed as a band somewhat outside Boone’s early eighties punk scene. While Allan did not specifically recall elements of Southern and regional identity within this scene, he does remember that around the mid-1980s, near the end of his own band’s run, “sensing” an emerging Southern pride in American underground rock:

[The B-52s and R.E.M.] came through. [R.E.M.] were sort of a country honk band. I have the distinct memory of Michael Stipe wearing this way too big cowboy hat the one time I saw him at P.B. Scott’s. They had kudzu all over the cover of their first album, *Murmur*, which is exactly what the music sounded like. There was no mistaking that they were a Southern band. You can hear it in Stipe’s vocals, and the way [Peter Buck] played guitar was kinda twangy.

(A. Duncan, personal communication, January 20, 2011)

While this history will not go into depth exploring Boone’s mid-to-late 1980s second punk wave, so well documented in the Boone Music Archive, it seems the regional emergence of Southern pride had little effect on this period of Boone’s alternative music. For the most part, this post-punk scene resisted appropriating twangy guitars and other country signifiers, incorporating keyboards and other electronic sounds instead. While different in this sonic respect, Allan also felt the bands forming later in the decade may have possessed more commercial aspirations than earlier bands who helped create the statewide network of DIY venues and resources for those who came after. A similarity between both scenes was a lack of female performers. Sheila Valentine, of Three Hits and a Miss, is the only female performer we know of from Boone’s first punk wave. As a member of No Reason Why and Hemo Boy, Wendy Sykes was the sole female performing presence in Boone’s second wave.

Boone's Third Punk Wave: Mid-1990s-early 2000s.

Our story skips ahead to around 1992, when rock bands seem to have begun forming after a brief dry spell of Boone venues willing to host anything too angry, challenging, loud, or weird. In the period starting around 1992 and winding down near the end of the decade, a third wave of punk community grew up in Boone. Examining this period is important for a couple major reasons. First, despite the fact that many artifacts and participants from this period can still be found drifting around Boone, no one has thus far attempted to compile these resources in one place to uncover the story of this scene. Second, comparing the first and third waves of Boone punk underscores dramatic shifts in the issues and meanings under negotiation in American indie rock/pop during this time.

In 1994 Kevin Freeman made the less-than-twenty-mile move from Banner Elk to Boone, North Carolina to enroll at ASU as a freshman. Having grown up in nearby Crossnore, Kevin spent most of his teenage years in Banner Elk, travelling to Boone to hang out at record shops and attend rock shows. In 1991, before Klondike began booking punk bands, Kevin attended his first punk show at Ziggy's in Winston-Salem. Only fifteen years old, he quit his job so he could see The Ramones, who would be his "intro to everything" he wanted to pursue musically. The night proved to be a doubly momentous occasion. At this show, he would meet Karl, another mountain native who loved punk and would turn out to be Kevin's primary musical collaborator in the coming years. They couldn't have known then, but three years later, they would reunite in Boone and begin playing the music they loved, first as The Sick 66 (with long-time friend and lead-singer, Rob "the Stalker" Trice), then as The Cunninghams and, finally, as The Karloffs (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010). Founded in 1996, many see the The Karloffs as the uncontested godfather of Boone's contemporary alternative music scene.

Around 1992, bands like The Raw Clowns, Junkflower, The Husbians, Silly, Damage Done, Smartbomb, Marblehead, Boil, The Pygmies, Sivle Si Dog, Satchel Foot, Drunk Thumbs, and Hoss (later 800 Octane) formed to revive a "heavier" rock aesthetic on the Boone music landscape (C.

Taylor, email interview, December 20, 2010).²⁰ Kevin believes The Raw Clowns were the first of this new group of unapologetically loud and intentionally provocative young punk bands to secure a Klondike gig during this period. Kevin enthusiastically described the attitude that caused Klondike to ban the band after their first performance:

The Raw Clowns were Flipper-esque noise. It was so perfect because it was a huge middle finger when middle fingers meant something. “Sweet you just let us in the door. You have fucked up. We’re not gonna be back, we don’t care.” That was their thing and it was awesome. It kind of made it seem more dangerous than it was. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010)

In the fall of 1994, Hoss played an on-campus Misfits tribute show. Kevin, Karl, and Stalker Rob were all in attendance. This meeting would eventually produce one of the most notoriously contemptible bands of the nineties scene:

[Hoss] played some local shows and I became friends with them. A bunch of us were hanging around the Hoss practice space and messed around with the idea of doing a scum-punk side project. Dave Chaney from Hoss wanted to learn to play drums, Kevin had always played guitar and our friend Karl Moretz played bass. I kind of just grabbed a microphone and started screaming and cursing and the “Sick-66” was born. (R. Trice, email interview, December 25, 2010)

²⁰ A CD compilation from this era, released in 2003, entitled *Boone... Songs from Bfe* also exists and features bands from this early to mid-1990s scene. In addition to 800 Octane, Damage Done, Sticky, and Agent Ink, the compilation includes songs from Nemo, The Chris Church Group, and Pocket Size Grandma. Additionally, Sticky member, Chip Taylor, played in Cat Head Biscuit in 1990. He insisted the project “doesn’t even merit mention except that our singer Eric Bachmann, an amazingly talented guy, went on to found indie-rock superstars Archers of Loaf and still plays music under the name Crooked Fingers. Archers of Loaf, formed in Chapel Hill in 1990, recorded four studio albums before calling it quits in 2008. Crooked Fingers released records on the Chapel Hill-based Merge Records and the Athens, Georgia label Warm Records. They currently self-release their own material.

After all these years, Rob remained intensely proud of the drunken insanity he infused into this period of Boone rock. Corroborating all charges of his legendary psychopathic behavior, he explained, “I was trying to offend as many of the “too cool” political/PC punks as I could, and I succeeded.” The excessive partying eventually took its toll on the music, forcing Rob’s band mates to move on and nearly destroying his friendship with Kevin, whom he had known since elementary school (R. Trice, email interview, December 25, 2010).

Although Rob represents a somewhat extreme figure in this scene, the majority of scene participants did share his insistence that neither life nor music be taken too seriously. In the spirit of their local punk predecessors, they valued fun over musical virtuosity. As Sticky explained over fifteen years later:

We decided just to have fun and not take ourselves too seriously like other bands of the day.

You know the bands. No smiles, no laughs. Audience standing with their arms folded across their chests, too cool for school. We didn’t want that. We wanted a good time. That’s what every good North Carolina boy wants, besides Sundrop and Southern Comfort (Sticky, 2009, par. 1).

John “Blindman” Doherty agreed about the important role of humor as part of the scene’s overall character. An ironic local obsession with the Church of Subgenius during this time provides a related example. An organization dedicated to parodying commoditized belief and mainstream American culture, in general, the Church of Subgenius mockingly presented a clip-art style photo of a typical, 1950s dad, dubbed Bob Dobbs, as the god of their “religion.” Referencing this Church of Subgenius, Blindman and others photocopied and posted photos of one Robert Crandall all over downtown. He likened these ubiquitous Robert Crandalls to the Andre the Giant graffiti painted all over Asheville during the same time. According to Blindman, humorous jokes like these were “fairly consistent. It was all the same kind of people” playing with shared references and interpretations of their place and time in the world (J. Doherty, personal communication, October 7, 2010).

Even the contrary Stalker Rob described the Boone scene as “a fairly close community” where “everyone would normally try and hook each other up where they could, with equipment and loaning members where needed” (R. Trice, email interview, December 25, 2010). According to Kevin, “even the bands that we didn’t like, we were still like ‘Damn man, at least they’re doing it.’” Despite conflicts that sometimes arose as a result of most participants being “just young and stupid kids,” tensions about money, for example; most focused on the good times and cultivated scene cohesion through frequent and prolonged periods of hanging out. Kevin Freeman’s apartment on Howard Street provided one such place for this crucial, seemingly unproductive interaction. A collectively rented unit at a storage facility called Jesus Saves, on the Highway 105 Bypass, provided a more productive space where the business of making raucous music could unfold:

Everybody was around everybody all the time. They had the same interests. It seems like we were more motivated to go out and do something than people now. Seven bands in a practice space the size of a dressing room. That’s the cohesion we had. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010)

Approaching music in such a fun, cooperative way meant that the motivations and intentions behind music-making revolved around creating and solidifying friendships and reciprocal relationships. Blindman agreed that the situation of bands practicing together side-by-side and living in such close, small town quarters made the scene a community:

Often, half the audience were from other bands. The other half of the audience would generally be the consistent same people. New faces would appear and disappear, but you would generally see your friends there. You pretty much knew everybody at the show. When asked about any salient spiritual aspects of scene cohesion, John “Blindman” Doherty insisted music took precedence over any spiritual or political motivations. Instead, the punk community pivoted around a profound “love and respect for music and for the show. People would talk about

going to a show much in the way some people might talk about going to church. ‘Didn’t see you at the show last week, where were you?’” (J. Doherty, personal communication, October 7, 2010).

Mike did not participate in downtown Boone music-making during the 1990s, but his remembrances about growing up in Boone during this time reveal much about the enabling and inhibiting structures of place for someone interested in learning about more hidden worlds of music. He felt like “Boone has had a tradition with independent music stores. He remembered The Record Bar in the Boone mall as well as Grapevine Music & Video, located in the downtown mini-mall on the corner of King and Depot Streets, as places where one could find out about more “fringe” music. Individuals could make all the difference, too, and Mike remembered that “the dudes who worked there were into some pretty cool shit.” At the time, Mike felt that no one listened to the types of music he liked, bands like Bongwater and Butthole Surfers, but looking back he realizes that “obviously there were people who listened to it. There were stores that sold it” (M. Geary, personal communication, October 29, 2010).

This tradition of independent record stores began well before the 1990s. Record & Tape Depot opened beside the Appalachian Twin Theater in 1972 and sold vinyl LPs, 45s, 8-track tapes, and stereo equipment. The store relocated a couple times during the 1980s, when the name officially changed to Grapevine Music and eventually landed back downtown in 1991. By the middle of the decade Fat Cats Books, Music & Video moved in on Rivers Street providing another downtown venue for music lovers to browse, congregate, and converse (Brewer, 2008a). Record stores not only provided a setting for learning and talking about music, they often employed those individuals most actively involved in making alternative local music. Such was the case for Sticky, a band that started as “just four record store employees” whose musical interests coincided enough to warrant hanging out and jamming (Sticky, 2009, par. 1). As individuals occupied in day-to-day music business activities, including keeping up with and recommending new and diverse music, it seems only natural

that many musicians would work at record stores or, the opposite, music store employees would find themselves making music.

Aside from supplying the alternative music scene with the majority of its young musicians and audiences to begin with, ASU lent infrastructure to the local scene in other ways, including its student-run radio station, WASU. Growing up in Winston-Salem, Blindman often tuned in to listen to *Superstars Rock Concert*, a radio show where one could listen to live recordings of nationally popular music acts of the time. After broadcasting school, he began DJing at WASU after he moved to Boone in 1992. His on-air name was DJ Blindman and on his radio show, *Blindman's Little Black Box*, he aired self-made recordings of live performances by local bands. While he observed and recorded a wide variety of shows, the punk scene attracted him most (J. Doherty, personal communication, October 7, 2010). Sticky recalled their 1993-released seven-inch, *Sycophant/Francisco Cabrera*, receiving airplay on WASU (Sticky, 2003). In 1994, 800 Octane played live on WASU's *Zimmerman Show* (800 Octane, 2008). A user comment on an Agent Ink YouTube video posted by Blindman in 2007 indicates that the station also played this band's releases (djblindman, 2007). Chip Taylor, of Sticky and Port Huron Statement, attributed WASU's increased support of local music during this time to an early 1990s format change from a "classic rock" station to a "more traditional college format playing indie bands, weirder stuff" (C. Taylor, email interview, December 20, 2010).

Many members of The Karloffs and Hoss also resided in ASU's East dorm. Kevin and Rob remember their great one-day mini-tour of Boone when the Sick 66 debuted "on the mall in front of East dorm" at a "little East talent show" before playing the Jesus Saves storage facility later that night (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010). While ASU's Appalachian Popular Programming Society (A.P.P.S.) continued to book occasional shows at H'Appy's and the Alpine Lounge, most of the nineties punk shows took place in downtown Boone venues (Misner, 1998).

When Blindman arrived in 1992, Klondike was "a great place to see local bands" (J. Doherty, personal communication, October 7, 2010). In the early 1990s, Klondike was, in fact, *the* place to

listen to or play music in Boone. The venue even landed Boone a mention in *Rolling Stone*, after grunge exploded in the early nineties. The Karloff's Kevin Freeman remembers the magazine implying that Boone could become "the next Seattle" (Brewer, 2008c, par. 1; K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010). Sticky (2009) described the Klondike as their "roadhouse" and "favorite place" where "[h]undreds of sweaty folks, most of 'em our pals, commun[ed] for rock." They remembered the scene as "fun, ...raucous, ...Atomic Punk" (par. 3). Not only was Klondike fun, it was also one of the few opportunities for bands to potentially make money playing locally. Eric (2001) of Portland-based 800 Octane (formerly Hoss), remembered a 1994 Klondike show with Raw Clowns that earned the band four hundred and seventy-five dollars, the "most money [they] had ever made at a show" up until recently, in Portland. In addition to Klondike, Sollecito's Pizza, Viva Mexico, Wild Wings, Ferrara's Pizza, and a five-hundred person capacity venue on the second story of Rafters Grill and Bar hosted shows (Brewer, 2008c, par. 2; J. Doherty, personal communication, October 7, 2010; K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010).²¹

In addition to these public venues that punk bands and others playing "heavier" rock music hustled to book, bands like The Karloffs "were also regulars at riotous local house parties—yet another option seemingly of a bygone era in Boone." Kevin reminisced that such house shows, often played in basements, allowed bands to avoid the hassle of dealing with clubs and money-grubbing club owners (Brewer, 2008c, par. 8). Where venues indicated willingness, however, participants seized the opportunity. After working at Rafters, the most desirable alternative music venue in Boone during this time, the owners allowed Kevin to organize a BooneFest, three days of punk rock, with

²¹ Sollecito's Pizza was located on Rivers Street, next door to Fat Cats Books, Music, and Video. Wild Wings occupied the space next to Boone Bagelry where Hob Nob Café currently sits. Ferrara's Pizza later became Daylight Donuts and, now, Hot Diggity Dog. Rafters existed in the large space now occupied by ECR's, a software company specializing in retail automation solutions, tucked away on Howard Street beside Espresso News.

sixteen local and nationally touring rock bands “with styles ranging from surfer to punk to ‘devotesque’ to hardcore” (Tate, 1999b, p. 29).

In the BooneFest manifesto, organizers explained that they modeled this festival after an annual Wilmington WEFEST and “wanted to show the people of boone (about 15,000 college students) that there was an audience and need for shows other than reggae and grateful dead cover bands [*sic*].” Furthermore, “at the shows, all of the zines, demos, stickers, etc... are up for grabs to the audience, so no matter what your stuff gets in to the hands of possible fans and contacts.” While Kevin and friends managed to pull off two more BooneFest’s, by 2001 tensions arose between organizers and venue operators. For the third annual BooneFest, Rafters double booked the first night of the festival forcing Kevin to relocate events to Charley Horse (now Dos Amigos, in New Market Center), where the owners attempted to take more than the initially agreed upon door share (Kevin, Greg, Scott, Karl, & Gordon, 2001; K. Freeman, personal communication, February 19, 2011). While a sense of competition did exist, steep divisions between competing music scenes were apparently not as pronounced during the mid-1990s:

There wasn’t as much of an us against them as later on. At that time everybody was starting out and trying to get a foothold. ... It was cool. Jam bands playing Thursday night. We’re playing Friday night. We got to play twice as loud and better so they’ll like it, get more people in here drinking. But then it definitely did become an us against them (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010).

As long as spaces existed for all types of music and audiences, tensions remained at a minimum. Chip, of Sticky, also emphasized this era as the glory days of alternative rock, when a larger segment of the general population, and college kids especially, wanted to listen to bands playing within the basic rock ‘n’ roll parameters of two guitars, bass, and drums. A zine ad for Dead Things cassettes (post-Boone Pink Collar Jobs project) even attempted to connect punk’s trajectory and values with the folk music so prevalent in western North Carolina:

In most towns we've experienced outside the Southern Appalachian mountains in the last 2 or 3 years, the punk rock show has died. It has become institutionalized and predictable...a dead thing. DIY punk rock music is folk music, created in order to bring people together as a community to dance, laugh and be together because we are in love—and together we can conquer the world. However this idea has been forgotten in many scenes that have become clathetic. Why are we here? Why do we tour? Why do we show up at shows? To see a band? Watching! Observing! We are no longer satisfied with being observers or being observed! We are bringing the dead things back to life!²² (Hicks, 1996)

By mid decade, rock music had, once again, carved out a prominent presence able to compete with the more dominant and interconnected roots music and jam band scenes.²³ Sometime during this golden era, a group of punk bands went in on a storage unit at the Jesus Saves storage facility, on the Highway 105 Bypass, and turned it into rock central. For a period in 1996, a two-story, rat-infested, non-insulated, cave of a storage unit, complete with a sliding garage door, served as a cleverly improvised place for practicing, hanging out, and putting on shows. Sometimes Hoss, Agent Ink, Pink Collar Jobs, and The Karloffs practiced side-by-side. "We were constantly around each other," Kevin repeated (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010).

Fortunately, a documentary from this time, *Jesus Saves: A Documentary of the Boone Punk Scene* (W., 1996) remains. Created by Matt, of The Super Spies, the film features performances by Pink Collar Jobs, The Heebie Geebies, The Style Kings, The Accidents, and The Super Spies. It also

²² For a recent analysis of social dynamics, tensions, and recent changes within Boone's old-time scene, see David Wood's thesis "*That ain't old-time*": *The shifting ambassadorship of Appalachian old-time music* (2009).

²³ Kevin started our interview with an anecdote illustrating more contentious times between Boone's various music scenes. At first, Kevin listed the jam scene as this alternative scene's only competitor. After a moment, he remembered the old-time scene and told his Old Crow Medicine Show story. Jason, of Pink Collar Jobs, had approached him about the old-time string band playing one of the punk shows. Puzzled that "the bluegrass guys" wanted to play a punk show, Kevin ultimately decided that it wouldn't work "because, you know, it was kind of us against them."

includes interviews with band members and other scene participants sharing experiences and interpretations of scene activity and the meanings of punk practice. With the exception of one audience member who appears to spit in the face of a rather unconfident-looking Super Spies guitarist, the documentary emphasizes inter-scene solidarity more than competition. Rob the Stalker's remembrances of "blowing away" the Heebie Geebies (later the Crimson Spectre) and Joey Tampon and the Toxic Shocks during the Sick 66's *Jesus Saves* debut indicates that some inter-scene competition certainly existed at shows. As already noted, Rob perceived an undesirable "politically correct" punk contingent whom he saw as aloof, hypocritical, and lacking a sense of humor. In short, he obviously saw these "too cool" individuals as illegitimate punks (R. Trice, email interview, December 25, 2010). Many of the interviewed participants in *Jesus Saves*, however, downplayed inter-scene tensions and refused to treat their punk involvement too seriously, while nevertheless professing their politically-engaged artistic commitment and the importance of believing in oneself enough to actively pursue a passion.

For Chris, punk represented another attempt to recover a radical rock 'n' roll spirit. Furthermore, pulling this off meant conjuring enough energy to shatter boundaries between performer and audience to produce, however briefly, a creative social communion:

What's ideal is when the bands actually have enough of a sense of humor to include the audience in the act of creation, in music. It lets the people in the audience know that what the bands are doing isn't some specialized activity that only geniuses can do. I think when kids can grab the microphone from a singer and sing a few verses, it lets him know that he can do that, too. That can go beyond music. It can be a political action or art or anything. It lets you know that this activity isn't something specialized that's out of your reach. You can participate in the act of creation, too. That's something really positive and it's not something you get a lot (W., 1996).

Living up to ASU's reputation and "Happy Appy" nickname, the documentary makes no bones about the influence of marijuana on this punk scene, opening with The Heebie Geebie's playing a cover of Black Sabbath's "Sweet Leaf": "When I first met you, I didn't realize. / I can't forget you or your surprise. / You introduced me to my mind." Then, of course, the wild stories and surreal performances described by participants of this scene could not have happened without alcohol, sometimes copious amounts. Most interviewees, however, stressed punk's more serious cultural agenda and worldview. As one person put it, "I think it's the day of the smarter punk." Although all interviewees saw preaching or overt political messages in musical performance as distasteful, most agreed about the "more mature" underlying ideological stance behind nineties punk. Amanda, bassist for the Super Spies, saw it as "a lot more about groups and getting things done and being active in social causes... not so much about being dirty and running into people."

During this time and within this scene, anti-consumerism, gender relations, and environmentalist action ranked among punk's most pressing political concerns. Through punk zines, scene participants augmented the know-how of their communities and connected with the larger national network of punk community. By reading and making zines, one could enter a trans-local conversation about what it meant to be punk, the successes and failures of grassroots, do-it-yourself projects and performances, and how one became an engaged human being. Dave, of The Heebie Geebies, explained:

It's really about being aware that you don't have to do anything any set way. You can do it your way. D.I.Y., you know. You may suffer consequences, but it still puts the mindset into you that you can do those things. It's about just being a responsible person, as far as the things you do affect our world. If you're considerate of other people and think about your actions, the things you buy especially, and the things you support, maybe you can make the world a little bit better place. (W., 1996)

Musical performance, alone, could not convey everything. Where tensions did exist, words offered opportunities to more fully negotiate punk's cultural motivations and intentions. In zines, in everyday talk about the domain of alternative music, and via song lyrics, such meanings were laid bare. Jason Hicks, of Pink Collar Jobs, produced at least two zines that came out of this scene. *The Ghetto Garden: D.I.Y. Country Trash Livin'* (Hicks, 1996) offers personal anecdotes about the author's attempts to live more sustainably. Not only does Hicks provide do-it-yourself guides to urban guerrilla gardening and harnessing solar energy, he delves into deeper political implications of what it means to be punk. He exposes the classist and racist dimensions of zoning laws, urges readers to study dynamics and hierarchies of oppression, advocates for expressions of love, and connects artistic creation to a politics of action. "I love music and how it can bring us together," Hicks wrote. "I love to be part of the collective workings of a band...and I love to dance and scream at punk shows." Jason also belonged to a traveling puppet show *Cirkus Subverkus* that toured through the eastern United States in early 1996, organizing and educating people about economic globalization and free trade. Creative actions, Hicks insisted, were "the strongest tool we have." He further elaborated his artistic intentions, stating: "We stage carnivals, wild celebrations of resistance, massive spectacles to unmask power." Sometimes Boone bands used song lyrics as a vehicle for painting portraits of the kind of social disengagement they sought to fight. Take these lyrics by The Goodnight Brothers, from their original song "Spelling Bee":

I am the math guy. / I never dream. / If a plus b equals c, then give me a c and i'll shut up. /
Just don't cut corners with me. // I am the champion of useless information. / Can talk my
way out of any situation. / I'm just a liar but I've got the proper attire. (Goodnight Brothers,
2000)

In *Jesus Saves*, punk scenester Chris talked about contemporary punk's concern with female empowerment and how this has entered scene consciousness via the larger figured world of punk. He

listed feminist punk bands on the Olympia and Portland-based label Kill Rock Stars—Bikini Kill, Heavens to Betsy, and Bratmobile—as examples supporting his assertion that:

a lot of the most exciting and interesting music being done right now is by girl bands. Not only are the lyrics fucking great and in your face and fiery and angry, like early punk was. It is sort of cured of its old sexist, capitalist overtones (W., 1996).

Furthermore, he insisted that while some listeners disparaged these bands for being musically “primitive,” he appreciated their radical intentions and inventiveness:

The music was as interesting as the message. It’s good that that’s out there because it makes feminism cool for young girls. It makes them feel not out of place when they go to shows.

There’s nothing worse than going to a show, for a girl, I imagine, and there’s just four bands, all boys—boys in the audience just jumping around, doing their thing. It’s pretty alienating, and makes you think that the punk thing is just as bad as any other form of entertainment in this racist, sexist, capitalist, patriarchal country. (W., 1996)

Thankfully, there seem to have been more female performers in Boone’s third wave than its first. The One Percenters boasted frontwoman, Katherine “I have a tattoo of Britney Spears” Carpenter (Tate, 1999c). Super Spies had females on bass and drums. Lynn Williams played guitar and shouted in Pink Collar Jobs (W., 1996). The Nancies had guitarist and vocalist Courtney Brook, who felt like such a misfit she used to think she was an alien sent to Earth to bear witness to human cruelty. “Sounds silly,” local music writer, Cat Tate wrote, “but when you’re a female fronting a punk band and you live in Sparta, NC (current punk population:2), I can see how she didn’t feel like she fit in” (Tate, 1999a). Inspired by the aforementioned Kill Rock Stars bands as well as Babes in Toyland and Hole, The Nancies used their music to communicate feminist issues and combat gender stereotypes.

Formed in 1995, Agent Ink became one of Boone’s most popular bands during this time. In captioning a YouTube video he uploaded of the band performing “Leper” at an October 1997

performance at Klondike, Blindman described them as “emo/rock” (djblindman, 2007). Though the band did not seem to possess any obvious political leanings, they did play a 1999 mountaintop removal benefit at Rafter’s, cosponsored by ASU (Hoyle, 1999). While an all-male trio, female friends appear in a photo taken of the band after a recording session. Furthermore, Agent Ink lists Superchunk and Poster Children as influences; and, both these popular indie-rock bands of the time included female members.²⁴ Explaining what motivated them to perform music, Agent Ink guitarist Robert Gaddy replied, “My favorite part of the music scene is just hanging out, just going out and being a band. You can’t beat being a group.” Outside of a tight-knit core group of supporters, however, even this band, one of the area’s most popular, complained that motivating other people remained as problematic as fostering engagement any deeper than mere name recognition (Best, 1997). A year later, Nick Misner (1998) wrote a letter to the editor of ASU’s student newspaper, *The Appalachian*, about this very problem after an Agent Ink show at ASU’s Alpine Lounge failed to attract more than a small crowd.²⁵ Approaching the new millennium, rock bands were, again, forced into taking less-desirable campus gigs because of the narrow mindedness of downtown restaurant and club owners.

Travis Reyes remembered arriving in Boone at the tail end of this nineties rock renaissance. From his perspective, things died down approaching the new millennium because many participants were graduating and having to move on. He recalled that

²⁴ The long-lived indie-rock band Superchunk formed in 1989 in Chapel Hill. The band founded Merge Records that same year, re-solidifying Chapel Hill’s status as the indie-rock capital of the state through the 1990s and up to the present day. The success of Merge has been recently chronicled by John Cook (2009) in *Our Noise: The Story of Merge Records, The Indie Label that got Big and Stayed Small*.

²⁵ ASU remodeled the nightclub Alpine Lounge located in the Plemmons Student Union in the early 2000s, turning it into the Table Rock Room. Furthermore, a bowling alley once existed where the Grandfather Ballroom now sits. Mike Geary remembered that music shows also happened at this on-campus bowling alley during the 1990s.

Mostly they were college kids coming up at the same time, and most of them were English majors, I think. So most of them went on to become teachers and librarians and that sort of thing. Liberal arts students. ... There were very good independent media outlets in town, and I think this group of kids were very much centered around those places. I don't think it was always a happy family, but they all lived together. They were together wherever the music was. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

While most of the bands from Boone's third punk wave did eventually disperse, some took their time relocating or stayed nearby. Pink Collar Jobs moved down the mountain and re-formed as Dead Things in Asheville, putting on house shows that temporarily created an Asheville-Boone music connection. Agent Ink stuck around Boone until 2003. Some of its members formed the countrified Why Mama Cries in the late 1990s. Cat Tate wrote about "Boone's first and only cowboy outlaw band" and quoted drummer, Seth Corts, describing the band as a "whole lotta country, a little bit o' punk, and a whole lot of drunk" (Tate, 2000b). Eventually, they, too, ran out of reasons to stay in Boone. Likewise, Agent Ink moved to the Triangle region before splintering into other musical projects. The Karloffs remain near Boone and even play occasionally. For Kevin, though, it's harder to get excited about performing nowadays:

I miss those days. It's weird. Now it's like when we play shows a lot of times it seems like a job, and I don't like it. It's stand around, load equipment, play your set, load your equipment up, split. Whereas it used to be we would drive wherever just to go hang out with our friends. We just happen to haul our band equipment with us. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010).

Anyone who hangs around Boone long enough will eventually hear the common local saying "If you don't like the weather, wait an hour and it will change!" The same could be said for the bands, the businesses, the personnel, and the very cultural fabric of this dynamic college town. Although Boone's tolerance for heavier rock sounds waned somewhat in the early 2000s, BooneFest continued

along with the punk sounds of the Candy Ass Pansy Bitches (who Blindman described as performance punk), Death to Cortez, and Hellvis Presley Overdrive (a dramatic reconfiguration of Karloffs and Pink Collar Jobs members) (J. Doherty, personal communication, October 7, 2010; K. Freeman, personal communication, February 19, 2011). Especially after Old Crow Medicine Show received their big break busking outside of downtown establishment Boone Drug, the ascension of rootsier Boone bands like The Lazy Birds, Acoustic Syndicate, and Snake Oil Medicine Show seemed inevitable and in keeping with a resurgent national interest in “pre-commercial,” pre-World War II sounds and styles (Tate, 2000a). These bands and many other performers of bluegrass, old-time, and other roots music genres continued to successfully perform for and attract large local and regional audiences throughout the decade of the aughts.

Cat Tate wrote about these bands in her end-of-1999 local music scene report for *The Paper*. She listed Cottonwood Brewery, on Howard Street, as “the most dedicated venue in the high country” and credited manager John Rush for “bringing live acts from across the country to Boone on just about every night of the week” (Tate, 2000a). Rush began booking music in Boone after he arrived, in the late 1990s, and visited Turtle’s (now Hob Nob Café). He couldn’t believe that “there were 20-year-old kids sneaking into the bar to see a bluegrass band ... getting pumped about really great music.” In addition to Cottonwood, Rush eventually established a booking monopoly over most of downtown’s major music venues—Rafters, Geno’s and Murphy’s. While Rush covered an impressive spectrum of music, booking everything “from bluegrass and blues to jambands, DJs, break dancers and funk freak shows, many in Boone’s heavier, more experimental rock music scene fell somewhat outside Rush’s network and personal tastes (Brewer, 2008b).

Reporting for *The Appalachian*, Dan Frazier (2001b) remarked that “over the past few years, Boone has begun to see a steady flow of bands with similar styles of bluegrass, jazz and improvising jams that always perform to a packed crowd.” He wrote that “Rush is sometimes criticized for bringing the same style of music to Boone.” Though Rush said he “only books what receives a good

response,” he denied that money completely drove his booking decisions: “I would love to do this as a career, but... I don’t see that happening. ...I still cater to the starving artist and my fax machine is bigger than my TV.” He believed that “learning about music is a natural expression of that desire to discover new things” that people are supposed to develop while in college. Despite the limits of Rush’s booking, one cannot deny his instrumental role in shaping Boone’s musical nightlife, especially during the early 2000s.

Boone blogger Elizabeth (2001) found Boone’s music scene during this time “an odd one.” She explained:

There are mostly jam bands, which I don’t even bother with, and a few indie rock bands. Last year was awesome. We had the Candy Ass Pansy Bitches and Why Mama Cries. ... But, alas, both bands have broken up and all but a few members have fled Boone. So we get Player Piano, The Port Huron Statement [project with Chip from Sticky], and Maple Stave U.S.A. (par. 3)

Elizabeth blogged about going with friend Mer to see mutual friend Chris Hutelmeyer, play a Black Cat Halloween show with Player Piano, “formerly known as the cooler Pency Prep” (par. 2).²⁶ Pency Prep began as a musical project in Concord, North Carolina, northeast of Charlotte, founded by childhood pals Jason Roberts (lead guitar), Brian Harding (vocals, rhythm guitar) and Matt Cole (drums), while all three attended high school. Chris joined them on bass after they all moved to Boone in the fall of 2000. As Jason Roberts explained: “One of our goals as a band is to expand Boone’s music scene beyond jam bands and bluegrass. We hope to establish a more broad scene of indie rock in Boone” (Frazier, 2001a, par. 8).

²⁶ Pency Prep took their name from the private high school attended by Holden Caulfield in *Catcher in the Rye*. When they found out another band already claimed this name, they quickly changed to Player Piano, after Kurt Vonnegut’s dystopian novel of the same name.

Though Chip Taylor apparently didn't consider The Port Huron Statement a "Boone band," he remembered the duo playing for burritos at Black Cat once every couple months from 2000 to 2003. Todd joined Chip's one-man band sometime after September 11, 2001. "It was our way to fight terrorism," Taylor (n.d.) later recalled.²⁷ In the process, they also "made some good pals back in the Boone days" when they "couldn't be happier to be sharing the bill with [Player Piano] for two nights" (Port Huron Statement, 2006).

Occasional shows at Black Cat or the Old Jail House (now Proper Southern Food) didn't create enough opportunity or momentum for many to persist in Boone. Port Huron Statement relocated to Raleigh and evolved into an eight man ensemble before retiring in 2008 (C. Taylor, email communication, December 20, 2010). Pency Prep also dispersed after leaving ASU. Jason Roberts went on tour as part of Ben Kweiler's band, while Brian Harding returned to Raleigh to form the indie folk rock band Hymns. Jason re-joined Harding in 2005 shortly before the band relocated to New York and released three recordings on the Celeste, TX Blackland Records: *Brother/Sister* (2006), *Travel in Herds* (2008), and *Appaloosa EP* (2009) (Blackland Records, n.d.). The most successful band to come up and through Boone during the 2000s, Hymns falls into the category of indie bands who embraced a folkier, roots-rock aesthetic in this decade, following national trends in underground music.

Where persistence did occur and participants in Boone's past alternative music scenes could find ways of employing themselves while continuing to pursue artistic and personal interests, many unbelievable stories and local tall tales await the sharing. Allan Duncan and John "Blindman" Doherty landed jobs at ASU's Belk Library, while Kevin Freeman bartends at Boone Saloon and co-

²⁷ "The Port Huron Statement of the Students for a Democratic Society" was released by the SDS at the national convention meeting in Port Huron, Michigan on June 11, 1962 as "a beginning in our own debate and education, in our dialogue with society." The statement's introduction declared: "We are people of this generation, bred in at least modest comfort, housed now in universities, looking uncomfortably to the world we inherit."

owns the record store, 641 rpm. They represent exceptions to the rule of outmigration from the mountains that most students and other young transients eventually face. If we care to listen to their recollections of musical practice in this place and the lessons they have arrived at by doing and dwelling in the domain of music here, we can learn much. Understanding this local history enables us to better see the ways specific situated music scenes become shaped by local, regional, national, and international forces over time. It also enables an understanding of how individuals and small groups have defied cultural structures and delved within to unearth new sounds and meaningful expressions. One can only begin to understand Boone's current experimental music scene given some knowledge of this history. Without this story, we can neither understand the performances of our present, nor fully engage in negotiating the local and global cultural meanings, possibilities, and visions for the alternative musics already crowding the horizons of our future.

CHAPTER FIVE

Learning in Boone, North Carolina's Contemporary Experimental Music Scene

Unlike most of his nineties punk peers, Kevin Freeman managed to stay in Boone. In addition to occasionally continuing to play with The Karloffs, he now bartends at the Boone Saloon and co-owns record store, 641 rpm. When I formally interviewed him, we began our conversation by talking about current happenings in Boone's more underground scene. "Do you know the band Doc Aquatic?" he asked before proceeding to tell me this story:

They were on WNCW last night while I was at working at the Saloon. They were talking about the Boone music scene and someone said something about up and coming indie rock. I was like 'Where the hell are these people at, you know?' I want to see this. They were talking about the Naked Gods because they played one of their songs. It was weird. Yeah, they are the indie rock band in Boone. Doc Aquatic, I mean, I've seen them once or twice, you know, but I never really thought about them as indie rock. I thought they were a jam band. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010)

Doc Aquatic and other Boone-formed bands, like Do It To Julia, have adopted the "indie" label to court a more hipster, rather than hippie, crowd. In 2009, David Brewer reported:

For more than a decade, Boone has developed a reputation—for better or worse—as a hotbed for young jambands that are often comprised of ASU students. Using the sounds of the Grateful Dead, the Allman Brothers, Phish, and Widespread Panic, these bands have frequented High Country stages playing long, improv-based shows that make for good dance parties, but don't exactly give non-jam fans anything to get excited about. (Brewer, 2009a, par. 1)

Doc Aquatic insisted that instead of being a run-of-the-mill Boone jam band, they offered an “eclectic brand of indie rock” that attempted to “find a balance between their love of classic rock and folk from the likes of Neil Young, Bob Dylan and The Beatles, and newer indie rock stylists like Wilco, Animal Collective, and Dr. Dog” (par. 7).

“What is ‘indie’? What’s a hipster?” I overhear my downstairs neighbors and their friends discussing from their patio beneath my bedroom window. It’s a cool summer evening in July of 2010, and they are doing what people downtown and everywhere else in the surrounding area seem to do a lot of during the summer—hanging out and having fun. In exchange for their having to hear my singing and guitar stumbling, I must overhear them discuss some utmost social concerns.

While the subject already interests me, I am also intrigued because they seem to be adorned with all the outer trappings of hipsterdom. They’ve mastered indie fashion, in other words—successfully aping and creatively combining fashions from the eighties and early nineties, including skinny jeans, flannel shirts, plaid styles, homemade pieces, thrift store acquisitions, and other necessities from hipster brands like Urban Outfitters or American Apparel. This visual component of underground indie music culture has become popular fashion, divorced from any necessary interest in underground music—its underlying social meanings or identifications. Rather than inquire into this culture’s deeper meanings, many concern themselves more with how to appear in the know, including the right clothes to buy and music to consume.

Indie rock/pop now represents a popular figured world of music unto itself; and, Doc Aquatic represents one of many bands who now use the term in order to benefit from the now mainstream popularity of a once underground music. Others, like Do it to Julia and The Ghost Sounds, have also followed suit (Do it to Julia, n.d.; The Ghost Sounds, n.d.). Most of these bands formed as ASU student bands in the mid-2000s and have since relocated to the Asheville or Triangle area of the

state's Piedmont.²⁸ Those who do stick around tend to embrace, or at least respect, more of a mountain personal and cultural identity and find ways of fusing the predominant musics of the area with individual interests and styles. Upright and Breathin,' for example, proudly proclaim their delivery of "Appalachian Flavored Jam to the High Country since 2006" (Upright & Breathin', n.d.). Though traditional in musical orientation, the band includes such rockers as The White Stripes and cult country singer-songwriter Townes Van Zandt among its influences. David Brewer has described the band as a "raw and rocking acoustic band with bluegrass instrumentation but with no intention of minding the genre's rather strict and confining rules" (Brewer, 2009b, par. 5). A common theme that runs through all these bands is the attempt to fuse many, many genres. We live in an age where the figured world of alternative music exists as so shattered and uniquely combined that even more mainstream bands emphasize their experimental fusions of various musical worlds.

Getting Started

Consistent with Lucy Green's (2001) findings about how popular musicians learn, most creative participants of Boone's experimental scene mentioned parents as early instigators and supporters of musical activity (p. 24-26). In some cases, parents selected the instrument they wished their child to learn. Miquela began taking piano lessons "at the behest of [her] dad," who "kind of picked it" for her. Likewise, Gabe's mother started him out with Suzuki violin lessons, at age five, after watching a Chinese violin virtuoso on television. Just as Green found that musicians who do not, for one reason or another, self-select their first instrument often eventually move on to a more personally preferable one later in life, Miquela tired of classical music and quit after reaching a developmental "plateau" (M. De Leon, personal communication, January 5, 2011). Likewise, despite

²⁸ Many still return to Boone to play big venues, like the Boone Saloon, or festivals, like the annual Music on the Mountaintop. Elfowl's Facebook, not only called Raleigh home, but added "and fuck the mountains." This type of disappointment about Boone's limited entertainment and employment opportunities is not uncommon among young creative immigrants to the region, many of whom eventually leave out of choice or financial necessity.

his present return to the violin as his main musical focus, Gabe described his early violin instruction unfavorably: “The Suzuki [method] just teaches you to hate music” (G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

Several participants were fortunate enough to have family members who could help them play the instruments they desired to learn. Nathan’s mother showed him his first guitar chords (N. Sheets, personal communication, December 17, 2010). Christian remembers his dad “played acoustic guitar” and used to “sing to us and play Beatles songs growing up” (C. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2010). In the late 1990s, Chris’s brother took lessons and played in a Modest Mouse-type indie band that practiced in his family’s basement. Listening to his brother and friends, Chris became inspired to learn bass (C. Hutelmeyer, personal communication, October 23, 2010). When Gabe moved on from Suzuki violin, his father, a former touring folk musician, helped him learn songs on guitar, as Gabe’s brother learned bass (G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010). Hannah recalled her sister, Caitlin, showing her a few chords on piano (H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011), while Seth’s father, who already played harmonica, learned guitar with his son.

If not immediate family, other close relatives often acted as models of music-making and provided informal opportunities for informal observation. Seth remembered looking up to a “cool uncle” who smoked pot and played in country rock bands (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011). The activities of more distant relatives sometimes provided the inspirational momentum and familial precedence for musical activity. Joe and Crosky’s grandparents played instruments and were musical role models for their grandsons (J. White, personal communication, March 18, 2011). Likewise, while inactive during her childhood, Kate proudly remembered a violin playing grandfather, who seems to have been an inspiration (K. Davis, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

Others took advantage of access to instruments around the house and made do with whatever happened to be available. Though no one in her family actively played, Kate took advantage of a family-owned piano that presented an enabling opportunity for self-initiated learning. Her story mirrored my own childhood self-instruction on piano. Michael's musical start involved "banging on pots and pans," an activity encouraged by his mother, leading to his joining the elementary school's drum corps (M. Pierce, personal communication, December 17, 2010).

Instruction in more formal, school settings played large roles in the musical development of many of the scene's participants. Kate and Hannah played clarinet in school bands, while Caitlin played trumpet (K. Davis, personal communication, December 16, 2010; H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011). Opportunities for indulging personal musical proclivities sometimes arose in school settings, as well, providing early opportunities for playing in front of peers. Kevin attended high school in Banner Elk and remembered:

Our band director was awesome. He let us go up there between the concert bands. I look back like "Damn, that guy was cool as hell to let us do that." He just had a love for music. He didn't care that we sucked and were playing terrible stuff. We played this song I wrote in high school called "My Love's a Vampire." All the kids went nuts; they ran out onto the gym floor dancing all around us to a straight up punk rock song. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010)

Nathan had a similar experience at Watauga High School during the mid-2000s:

In high school, they started having open mics, and I saw some bands there. I was in a band called Bonjos and there was another good group called Classy Cowboy. Those were the first shows I really saw in town. (N. Sheets, personal communication, December 17, 2010)

Most pursued private music lessons, as well. I, myself, eventually took piano lessons. Christian played his first show at a coffee shop with his Richard Gere look-a-like guitar teacher (C. Smith, personal communication, October 2010). Nathan further developed his guitar skills by taking

lessons with Rob Baskerville, of the local blues band The King Bees.²⁹ Moving on from drums, Michael, too, received lessons from several guitarists in and around Macon, Georgia (N. Sheets, personal communication, December 17, 2010; M. Pierce, personal communication, December 17, 2010). Sarah took lessons to learn old country walking bass lines, while Caitlin received bluegrass and classical guitar lessons (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011).

Many participants cited friends as big influences in getting them started with music. Miquela played her first show when best friend, Lauren, dragged her to an Aberdeen coffee shop's open mic night. Gabe cited his friendships with former, long-time musical collaborator, Abe: "Meeting him was the biggest inspiration on my life as far as music... everything he exposed me to, including lifestyles of playing music and different instruments and genres and artists really directed me to where I am right now" (G. Nardin, December 16, 2010). As middle school kids in a Raleigh suburb, Dylan and Ben were "long hair, AC/DC kids ... into skate boarding and listening to classic rock." Dylan, likewise, claimed that "Ben, in many ways, crafted my interest in music and he and I have explored similar musical tangents." He also mentioned Gabe and Abe, fellow transplants from around Raleigh:

Both of them are the most musically opinionated dudes you've ever met in your life. Abe really introduced me to a lot of music as well. Skye influenced me to come up here as well. When it comes to music, I still sort of hang with that crowd. We explore the same things. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Many participants still play with friends they grew up playing music with. Derek and Seth "met through a youth group at church; and, because we had similar interests in music, we started playing in really loud bands together." Their dedication to performing local music solidified upon meeting current bandmate, Brian:

²⁹ Throughout the mid-1980s, according to *Boone Music Archive*, Baskerville also played bass in a classic rock/blues band called The Vibrosonics.

Brian's band was one of the first concerts I ever went to go see. I was, like, twelve. They were called the Kangaroo Club. Seth and I's band was called Butterscotch Resistance. We went to go see Brian's band. We really liked them and wanted to get really good and play with them.³⁰ (D. Wycoff, personal communication, October 23, 2010)

Seth elaborated Derek's remembrances of their early experiences observing and learning to rock:

Andrew and Brian both had a band. Derek and I and Chase, our little running group, used to see their bands play on the weekends. That's when I became aware of independent rock music and kind of the punk ethos and shit—doing it yourself and throwing shows yourself. They'd play in people's houses or basements or at the Valdese Legion Hut. They were sixteen or seventeen-year-old kids throwing shows and getting thirty or forty of their friends to come out and pay five bucks so we could pay to rent the place out. When they left, we started bands and continued that tradition. That was a formative experience. I looked up to those guys as a kid; now I'm in a band with Brian. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 05, 2011)

The presence of established music scenes and the willingness of communities and individuals within these scenes to welcome, play with, and encourage newcomers proved significant in the early development of many participants. I already mentioned how, in addition to learning through Michael, we both found a comfortable community of creative people to grow with in downtown Macon. Dylan unexpectedly entered an enabling musical environment when he began participating in Raleigh's hardcore punk scene:

I never really expected to get into that music, but the scene there is so lush and there's a lot of respect within that scene. There's a lot of creativity and DIY emphasis. People have shows in their basements, and even some of the bigger bands in the area played shows with us. There was no dynamic of "Oh, we're too big of a band to play with this little high school hardcore

³⁰ In high school, Seth and Derek also played in a band called White Collar Massacre.

band.” That really turned me onto the community aspect of local music. It was unlike anything I’d ever experienced before (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011).

Adopted into the hardcore scene, not only did his new-found friends provide him with a guitar and amplifier stack, they worked with him until he developed the ability to play the music.

The four females I interviewed either became involved or further developed their musical experiences with local music scenes, directly or indirectly, through males. Similar to my story, sisters Sarah and Hannah began playing music in bands because their significant others played in bands and wrote songs. Sarah described how

Crosky and I had been dating for a couple years, and he had always had a band. They could never find a bass player that would stick around and would show up to practice. I was always there, so I was like “I’ll learn how to play the bass.” So I did.

Similarly, Hannah began performing with her guitar-playing boyfriend, Brandon, as Gill and Snapper before asking sister, Caitlin, to join the duo on drums to form Red Snapper. Eventually, the band would evolve into the seven-member Red Snapper Family Band. Prior to this, however, the three sisters participated in Winston-Salem’s punk and hardcore scenes. Sarah dated “a bunch of punk rock boys in high school,” but never developed the desire to play until hearing her now-husband, Crosky, and his brother, Joe, playing music she found more accessible (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011). “It was the same with me,” Hannah added. “It wasn’t until I met Brandon who played and wrote songs all the time that I actually tried to play music for real.” Looking back on it, though, both felt their more active music participation seemed inevitable. “We were just around it all the time” (H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011).

A good friend of the Adam family, Miquela gained access to a guitar and amp after her younger brother received these as birthday presents in their early teens. She began playing bass before moving onto slide guitar. In this case, Miquela’s brother played an enabling, though perhaps more

competitive motivating role, in jump-starting her musical endeavors. Kate's involvement in Boone's local experimental scene came after she answered a flyer posted by her current boyfriend and bandmate, Gabe. She explained having only participated in more formal avenues of music-making prior to her experience in this scene, explaining that her hometown, a wealthy, resort town in the state's Piedmont, offered little in the way of alternative music participation.

Most participants recalled music being part of their lives as far back as they could remember, even before they could engage in direct music-making. Within this scene many participants grew up on the rock 'n' roll of Led Zeppelin, Bruce Springsteen, the Rolling Stones, Bob Dylan, and the Beatles. Many participants also listed Southern rockers, like Lynyrd Skynyrd and the Allman Brothers, among the bands their parents listened to.

Participants who began playing at later ages often explained coming to music as more of a conscious decision. Though he grew up in Boone, Mike began making music while attending college in Boston, during the late nineties. Opportunities to watch shows and participate in novice music-making abounded:

I just started making noise with friends in noise bands. I was always really into music but, primarily, I did visual art. I played noise and punk because it was easy. You didn't have to know how to play music to play it. (M. Geary, personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Travis began his own musical narrative with his early twenties:

Beyond just screwing around in my room, actually collaborating with somebody, I started with my friend John. We shared a lot of interests in fringe sort of sounds, noise, that sort of thing. We both agreed you didn't have to be talented to do this kind of thing. You just made whatever you could with whatever you had. It was a pretty conscious decision. I was just living with him in his family's lake house, outside of Asheville, and we holed up there and played music. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October, 5, 2011)

While many looked back to specific events and experiences as significant to their future musical trajectories and current activities, most emphasized a certain unknowing, insisting that, at least initially, they pursued music solely for personal fulfillment and fun. Seth explained:

It was just a hobby. It was either am I going to get an electric guitar or am I going to get a shot gun—what thing am I going to get that’s going to determine what I do when I get home from school. So I got an electric guitar when I was eleven. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

Many participants related their music playing to other creative and performative activities, often stressing the inseparability of one from the other. Christian felt he learned much from trying to translate feelings from words to the guitar (C. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2010). Almost everyone at least dabbled in visual art, especially making collages. Even when participants did not make music at very young ages, they nevertheless danced and sang and acted creatively in response to and in conjunction with music listening. Listening to the Adam sisters talk about staging elaborate dance and song routines on a stair ladder in an old house where they grew up reminded me of the performances my own sisters and I staged with neighborhood children:

We were always hams. We were always acting silly and singing and we did dance and recitals and sang in church. There was never a “Oh, I can’t do this. Oh my god.” The performing was cool, but it was the writing and learning... Sometimes I’m still like “What is that? An E? Okay. Uh, hold on.” (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

For most participants, holding on to a childlike sense of playfulness, belief in self, willingness to put oneself out there, and ability to learn from errors, move on, and try again presented the most important factors in moving beyond novice, or even unconscious, musical practice.

What is Learned

Where musical learning happened in embodied, socially situated, and less mediated ways, musical competence and experience developed more quickly and meaningfully. In such peer-directed,

informal contexts, creative subjects learned several important aspects of musical practice. Participants often honed technical ability and mechanical skills through a trial and error process that privileged creativity and taught persistence. If one failed to execute the wished-for sounds the first time, participants learned to try again and again. Most interviewees downplayed any knowledge of formal music theory, their ability to read or write music, and the idea of innate creativity or inherent musical ability (i.e. “talent” or “genius”), often asserting that these all boiled down to doing and continuing to do music. Only Gabe spoke about writing out harmonically complex, multi-part musical compositions and ideas. Most participants shared a belief that musical competence and experience developed over time, through passionate everyday practice. Many also recognized that those with little economic leverage or material advantage still possessed the freedom to choose how to spend their time and energies and whether to take advantage of the material objects around them to experiment with sound.

Because such social music learning involves learning how to look, listen, and respond appropriately, subjects learned to improvise through limitations, try new things in front of others, and respond based on the sounds these others brought to the table. Individual musicians and bands often developed the capacity to enter into musical conversation through a combination of collective improvisation, jamming, and learning original or cover songs. According to Lucy Green (2001)

Free collective improvisation, as the most extreme or “pure” type of group improvisation, tends to be based on agreements that are minimal and idiosyncratic to the group. By contrast, jamming, tends to occur on the basis of high levels of agreement as to the harmonies, rhythms, structure, and other elements of the music, and is based on patterns that are not peculiar to the group or the particular piece in question, but that are on the contrary, well known and frequently employed in the musical tradition from which the musicians are drawing. (p. 43)

A common activity across Boone’s jam, old-time, and more experimental scenes, most bands and individuals interviewed developed ideas via jamming, whether they chose to call it such or not. In the

summer of 2010, Nathan and Michael, for example, collaboratively developed the songs they currently play as Small Talk by jamming on guitar and drums.

Subjects also learned to negotiate figured worlds of alternative music as well as how various aspects of this shattered field were manifest and practiced by specific groups of people in situated places. This involved developing familiarity with the many meanings behind and possibilities for alternative music making, understanding how various figured worlds play out in one's place, and claiming one's participatory role against this backdrop. It also entailed meeting and learning to relate to others with preferences for other types of music, life experiences, worldviews, and lifestyles different from one's own.

Even relative newcomers talked about Boone's musical landscape and the boundaries between a more experimental scene and other musical communities operating in and around town:

An outlet is essential to the development of the music scene here. Not every band wants to play in a bar because then you have a lot of drunk people who aren't necessarily paying attention to the band. The venues at the school are sort of monopolized by A.P.P.S. and they're sort of picky about the music they show. Normally it's sort of in the same realm; something they know will sell. Boone lacks a really efficient, convenient, cool venue, a commons, a public space for new music here. There's such a high turnover rate, in Boone, of people. There are people who come here for one or two, three, four years and then they're gone. I think a lot of times people just don't care. They don't get into the scene, they don't really care. They don't want to take action. You can't really blame them because they're not necessarily going to spend the rest of their life in that area. The school kind of dominates or is trying to dominate the downtown. They have Legends and these different venues where they show largely the same circuit of bands. It's not leaving any room for different stuff. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Seth talked more about jam band domination of the musical landscape, the university's influence on the local music scene, and some of Boone's unique enabling aspects:

The biggest part of it is schlocky college bar bands. Sloppy fucking run-of-the-mill, "I've got three Widespread Panic CDs and took enough guitar lessons to be able to jack off for hours on the guitar" kind of bands. That's fine. There's a place for that. Those dudes and dudettes when they play make lots of people happy. As in any college town, anywhere, that is not an urban area, there's a huge amount of jammy, festival kind of bullshit music. I don't mean to sound like I hate all of it. I love the Dead, but that music is solely used as an engine to take drugs and get fucked up and *be* in college. The people who play in the jam bands are kind of nerds. We do hang out with them, and if they walked down the street and we were fucking in New York, they would seem really out of place. But there's no concern about that here. If you're worth a damn, people will come see you play. Even if you're not worth a damn, people will come see you play. It's really the reason that bands who we play with and bands from out of town want to come play here. People are so excited about music here.

While self-consciously avoiding affiliation, he also saw the existence of more traditional music and older bands that travel but, nevertheless, find Boone an enabling home base:

Also, working bands, bands that work and tour, bands that go and play shows out of town. People like Melissa Reaves who is huge for herself. You have Melissa Reaves and the Lazybirds who bring three hundred people that I never see. So there's the older music. Doc Watson. ... On the [Naked Gods'] new record there's not going to be anything that sounds like the Avett Brothers. There's not going to be anything that you can even try to misconstrue as alternative country or Americana. But, I feel like if there's a tinge of that, it's because of this place. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

Sarah saw the lack of independent music being played on ASU's college radio station, WASU, as a disabling factor for those attempting to foster a more experimental music scene:

The college radio station up here drives me nuts. What are you listening to? They're playing the same stuff that's on the radio. I thought the point of college radio was to play independent music. Is that what everyone's listening to? What's going on? (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

Several seemed appalled about WASU's confused programming format and tendency to play boring, mainstream alternative rock, mostly from the nineties and early 2000s. Even in Athens in the mid-2000s, WUOG DJs expressed confusion about the shattered, many worlds of alternative music. Many questioned what could now be considered "independent," with several DJs lobbying to play popular, established bands, like Radiohead. In Boone, such frustration has led some to consider purchasing a radio transmitter and broadcasting "real" underground music throughout the downtown area.

Many who come to Boone with an interest in traditional music often end up learning old-time styles because of the established community and support for that type of music in this area. Part of learning in place, then, involves conscious consideration of local audience boundaries, expectations, and music preferences. Whether a performance aims to alienate or engage with a certain musical world and its corresponding audience, a certain understanding (and, sometimes, misunderstanding) of expectations and boundaries accompanies any and every performance. A significant part of social musical practice, then, involves learning how to get along with diverse others and exhibiting a willingness to respect, listen to, and respond, with at least partial understanding, to different abilities, feelings, and expectations.

Ways of Learning: Listening, Looking, and Doing

Deep, engaged listening represents one major way participants expanded musical experience and competence, especially once they possessed rudimentary understanding and skill on an instrument. Miquela moved on from the piano and finally found the sounds she longed to make when, at the age of sixteen, she heard Alan Lomax's *Plantation Recordings* of Muddy Waters: "I locked myself up for about a week, and, it's been slide since" (M. De Leon, personal communication,

January 5, 2011). Similarly, Michael explained how his own learning took off after he possessed some knowledge of the guitar, started listening closely to classic rock bands, ultimately realizing that one could find most sounds by simply moving up and down the neck of the instrument. Many participants learned by ear, and the vast majority did not regularly read or write music.

Many reported hearing music in life's white noise and paying attention to the sounds that color the backdrop of everyday life. Sarah found music in everyday speech: "Cadences and people's speech. We mock people a lot and I think some people don't realize it's not mean. The way you can say something sounds very musical sometimes. Some people more than others" (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011). Miquela said, "I hear music in lots of stuff that's not music. I really like it when you're sitting at a stoplight and you got your blinker on and your windshield wipers going and the person in front of you has their windows down blaring music." Listening also meant remaining open to the raw inspiration derived from feelings and emotions. To her everyday list of personal inspirations Miquela added "Heartbreak. Boredom would be in there, too. Everything really" (M. De Leon, personal communication, January 5, 2010). Kate, too, emphasized the inseparability of inspiration from the everyday: "I'm easily influenced, I guess, by just anything that happens. Since I don't have lyrics, it's not as easy to tell. But, I'll just look outside and I'll see something going on and it will influence the sound" (K. Davis, personal communication, December 16, 2010).

As DJs and record store employees, Mark and Travis possess enormous music and movie appetites. Michael, also employed by a media outlet, Fat Cats, daily consumes and interprets music and movies at a rate that astounds and sometimes annoys my more word-oriented mind. He often describes movies and music as creative food. Similarly, Mark's voracious listening schedule involves consistent and systematic absorption of new sounds:

I have a stack of records in my kitchen. That's where my equipment's at; so, what I do is, I go through that, and I have it in the order that I got it, like if I get like two new used records today, I put it in the back of the stack. I try to just, even if I don't feel like listening to some

sort of music, I try to listen to it anyway, pull it out of the stack and listen to it. (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

As a DJ and producer who cuts, scratches, and samples, records, Mark is a digger of interesting sounds, always seeking the potential for fresh recontextualizations. Relatedly, watching films constituted part of Travis's broad and deep listening regimen:

I love film music, also. That's always been inspiring to me. Creating a mood with just music, you know. I like how film music can exist on its own, out of the context of film and maybe take on a totally different meaning. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Many participants certainly shared an obsession with combining and recontextualizing sounds and images. Travis, however, was the most vocal about the connection between personal consumption and creative intention:

The whole idea behind Jerones is re-appropriating sounds. I don't want to make it a high-brow sounding sort of thing, but that's what the idea of Jerones is: re-appropriating sounds. Not just films, films were just something I'm very interested in. But, basically pursuing the idea of taking something that's so fixed in our brain, a sound that's been there, that you hear and don't even think about anymore, and turning it into something that makes you think about it. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2011)

Learning by looking also happens when individuals attend and consume live music performances. At shows, participants do more than observe embodied musical performance. They also watch how diverse others conduct themselves. Another aspect of looking involves investigating, or researching, musical interests, looking deeper into familiar music for new understandings, meanings, and identities. This might involve looking at and listening to records at record stores, at home, at get-togethers with friends, or even searching new music on the Internet. Without a doubt the most active musical learners in this scene included music makers and those who sought to learn through some situated creative practice. Legitimate participation often encompassed creating posters

or album art, taking photos, writing, and other documentary activities. Networking and booking shows and/or tours also presented active and legitimate participation options. Such daily participation almost always involved a combination of knowing how to listen, look, and do. Now we will consider how listening, looking, and doing specifically play out in the context of a communities of practice.

Bands as Communities of Practice

Bands were the social units I observed as most fitting the criteria of CoPs. Active participants in this scene largely fell into one of four groupings, with some musical projects and participants (like surf band, Small Talk) straddling two or more CoPs. While bands exist at the center of these groups, CoPs also include other active associates who, although not performing members of the bands around which CoPs center, nevertheless offer valuable skills and time toward the pursuit of CoP goals. Legitimacy is conferred through participation in any of the active paths toward learning outlined in the previous section. Most participants recognized four main CoPs. In order, from longest to shortest time in Boone, they are: The Gods, The Family, The Buds, and The Company.

The Gods CoP pivots around the band Naked Gods, but includes such integral collaborators and long-time friends as Travis, Kevin, Mark, and many others, like Chase and Andrew, not interviewed for this project. The Family mainly consists of two Appalachian families, the Whites and the Adams, who account for six-sevenths of Red Snapper Family Band, and their associates. While mostly ambivalent about claiming either a Southern or mountain identity, these first two bands possess a majority membership of individuals having grown up and lived in the Appalachian region their entire lives. The Buds represents my own small CoP, centered on the now defunct Clover Buds, but also including the projects of various combinations of four individuals (i.e. Hickory Choral Society, Head Cleaner, Something Horrible, Drug Ramp, Mall Prowler, Grow Up and Piper in the Wood). The CoP contains two transplants from Georgia, and two individuals who move in and out of the region. Finally, The Company revolves around ASU student band Easy Company (formerly Easy Company Collective) and their associates, mostly from around Raleigh, including the managers of the

basement venue, The Underground. I asked interviewees to describe this experimental scene's current social landscape and sonic spectrum.

Ten years of living in Boone meant Christian had a longer contextual view of the current scene and included performers who were now less active or had moved on to other locales:

Some of my really good friends play in a band called Red Snapper. There's you guys, Clover Buds. We played with a band No Eyes a few times. There's Mark Piss and Human Pippi Armstrong. He doesn't live here, but I still consider him part of the larger family. There's musicians who sporadically play together, like Travis and Mark and Joel and Tim Salt. I always go see Banana Da Terra. They don't play so much anymore. My friend Nathan seems to be playing a lot of cool surf rock. I saw him and Michael play the other weekend. There's Native Sway. We play with them. They're like a jam band, which we always have fun playing with or seeing them because it's so different than anything we do. The Karloffs.

They're kind of an institution to us. (C. Smith, personal communication, October 24, 2010)

While Christian did not mention any participants in The Company CoP, this interview took place in October 2010, before the basement shows really took off. The Gods became aware of The Company CoP in late 2010, and played their first show at The Underground in January 2011.

Mark (aka DJ Piss or OMI, for Old Man Insides), included those with whom he most closely associated, even if they had moved to other places:

There's been a bunch of players that aren't around here anymore. Pippi moved down to Charlotte. Eddie is a big part of the Charlotte scene now with Yardwork and Brain Flannel. Before the Naked Gods, a couple of them were soloists. They formed a band called James Dean Werewolf before they formed Naked Gods. Native Sway has a big following. That's the biggest jam band, but they don't like to be considered that I don't think. There's y'all, who are slightly new to the scene, and Mike who's rolling with y'all. I think Scott's the shit. His beats are fucking silly. I know I'm missing people... Then, there's like all the bluegrass

people, like the kids that I don't think are even really from around here, but, they end up coming here and get into farming and like making bluegrass music. Which is cool, but it's not my thing. (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

Later in our interview, Mark kicked himself for forgetting Red Snapper Family Band, but never mentioned any members of The Company, including members of Easy Company and those responsible for putting on the house shows.

Nathan arrived back in Boone in the summer of 2010, after a couple years in Asheville. He found the scene significantly changed from when he played here a few years before with Veranda and The Actuaries. In addition to listing bands, he attached useful descriptors, as well:

There's a lot of music popping up right now that... none of it sounds alike. Clover Buds are doing heavy, loud, minimal psych rock stuff. Naked Gods are doing CCR [Creedence Clearwater Revival] meets Pavement pretty much. Red Snapper Family Band. I don't even know what you'd call that... funky Appalachian folk rock or something. We're doing the surfy garage thing. There's the whole jam band thing, which can be kind of annoying sometimes, but it's something. Easy Company. They're doing their prog folk. But, I don't know if there has to be a bunch of bands that sound alike for you to call it a scene. (N. Sheets, personal communication, December 17, 2010)

Dylan saw the scene this way:

There's a lot of sort of jammy bands, not to say they're all bad, but it's cool to hear different stuff. Like, Michael and Nathan [Small Talk] are doing the surfy thing. You and Michael are doing the electrified sort of folk thing. I don't know what you'd call it. Red Snapper have a folkier rock family band thing. There's a lot of cool... I wouldn't say new or totally original, because Small Talk kind of has its roots in the standards of surf, but it's also all original what they're doing, and that's really cool and not that common. There's a lot of weird shit. There's Abe, who now lives in Asheville. He does this gut rumbling drone music which is just

unbelievable. That kind of attests to the dynamicness of the scene. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Although they booked virtually all the downtown experimental shows, Gabe neglected to mention 641 rpm participants associated with The Gods crew until prompted by bandmate Kate. This is likely because the majority of his band's shows are booked via The Underground house venue, through ASU, or out-of-town, using the band's non-local connections and resources. He described Clover Buds as one of "those loud bands that Michael does" and Red Snapper as possibly possessing "a little country-ish influence," but "more like a Neil Young country" (G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010). He emphasized the basement shows he was directly involved with. While most participants tended to emphasize the projects of their own CoPs and their personal experience, the length of time in Boone correlated to increased awareness of and willingness to engage a fuller spectrum of Boone's past and current local music landscape.

Conveniently for this project, a steady series of house shows began happening in September 2010, infusing this scene with some much needed vigor and reinforcing connections between all the CoPs under consideration here. In addition to attracting bands from across the region to play in Boone, these shows have made local experimental bands much more conscious of each other. In early September, I told Company CoP associates to come see Red Snapper Family Band, whom they had previously never heard. The eclectic Fat Cats Dark Side of the Shroom one-day music festival, featuring a wide spectrum of Boone's local music scene (including more traditional, jam, indie, and experimental performers) introduced Company associates to Small Talk and Red Snapper Family Band. Love at first sight, these two bands became immediate Underground favorites—playing multiple shows together in the months that followed. Even up until January, however, Seth, of Naked Gods, did not know Company associate, Dylan, who lived at The Underground and booked the basement shows. I pointed him out at a 641 rpm acoustic show featuring Slicnaton's bowed bass drones, a project of Nick Slaton, my personal favorite, though somewhat marginal, experimental

music performer in this scene, whom I did not interview for this study. I mention this here to emphasize that the perceived boundaries, commonalities, and relationships within this experimental scene remain very subjective, transient, and constantly evolving.

Now that we have examined how various individuals perceive the involvement and sounds of other individuals and CoPs within this scene, allow us to look at how bands describe themselves. In looking at this can we come to a closer understanding of the meanings and identities these CoPs find within various figured worlds of alternative music. The Naked Gods digital press kit describes the band as “a hapless burly-pop prog-punk quintet based out of the mountains of western North Carolina” (Naked Gods, n.d.). More reserved about their sound, The Red Snapper Family Band Facebook page describes them simply as “alternative,” while their chosen MySpace genre designators are “Minimalist/Neo-Soul” (Red Snapper Family Band, n.d.a; Red Snapper Family Band, n.d.b). Clover Buds, the initial band around which The Buds formed, played loud, droning rock, while affiliated projects have explored more ambient, psych, and metal sounds. Easy Company’s Facebook page describes the band as “orchestral rock” (n.d.a) whereas their ReverbNation website calls the band “Alternative/Very Loud and Very Quiet/Epic” (n.d.b). Every band demonstrated an interest in deconstructing conventional song structure, through either multi-part song suites or, in the case of The Buds, hypnotic repetition. More important than these basic sound descriptions, CoPs developed shared meanings and identities that, over time, usually became idiosyncratic ways of doing that further defined CoP identities. In the following sections, we will allow bands at the center of the four CoPs to talk about the processes behind such descriptors and public performance.

The Gods.

Here we consider three bands/performing projects subsumed within The Gods CoP: Naked Gods, Blue Sunshine, and Small Wonder + OMI. The Naked Gods undoubtedly represent the Boone band with the most collective underlying process. Three-fifths of the band—Seth, Derek, and Brian—

grew up in the neighboring Appalachian communities of Drexel, Hildebran, Valdese, and Rutherford College, all located in Burke County, in the Hickory-Morganton-Lenoir metropolitan area. Friends like Andrew and Chase came to Boone as well. In Boone, these three Gods met Chris and Christian.

Though Christian and Chris have, themselves, been playing music in or around Boone for over ten years, Naked Gods did not come about until 2006. Seth recounted the band's slow birth, from the time Derek graduated high school and joined him in Boone:

Derek and I started a band called Seth Sullivan and the Savages, which was just Derek playing drums and I was playing electric guitar, playing songs that we had written. Brian was aware of us, but didn't *know us* know us. Travis started booking at Black Cat sometime during the summer of 2005, and he booked a New Year's Eve show with an as-yet unnamed Brian Knox project, because Brian and Chris had been playing shows solo, just singing songs with guitars, that sort of stuff. Brian, of course, waited until the day after Christmas to start putting it together and freaked out. I was at home and didn't really have any actual musical talent to give. Derek was a really good guitar player, so he asked Derek to play guitar. Doug, who was in town taking a break from his vision quest, played drums, and Chris played bass. Chris and Brian lived together and had been buddies for years. So they played the show on New Year's and it fucking destroys everyone. They come out and fuckin' play thirty minutes of sort of badass psychedelic space rock, heavy space rock, and literally melt people's faces. That would have been New Year's Eve 2006. So, James Dean Werewolf is now the hot shit in town. Out of the gate, Travis books them twice more. So their next gig, Derek and Doug are in the band—people I've been playing music with for years. I'm here. We all know each other, and Brian and Chris are aware of the fact that I write songs. So, we're hanging out one night doing something somewhere and Brian's like "Seth, will you sing 'Mississippi Queen' by Mountain and play tambourine at our show?" At that point, Brian sang in the band. So I went to practice in this dude, Scott's, basement. Some dude who wasn't even in the band was

letting us practice in his basement. It was really weird. We went into his house in the neighborhood when no one was there and practiced. So, anyway, we did the show and played the Mountain song. It was a huge success, and I watched the rest of the show and, being the fucking egoist I am, was like “Damn, I could sing for this band and it would be better.” I went to Brian after the show and was like “Brian, can I become the singer in this band.” Brian said “Yes, if you give me a cigarette.” So I gave him a cigarette. This is kind of corny, but I said, “You never have to ask me for another cigarette as long as we’re in bands together. I’ll just give you one.” And, that kind of stands to this day.

Exhibiting the fragile nature of most young bands, James Dean Werewolf quickly disbanded when Seth, the band’s new lead singer, returned home after losing financial aid money for school. When Travis contacted him during the summer of 2006 about playing a solo acoustic show, featuring some “honky country songs” that did not fit James Dean Werewolf’s aesthetic, Seth felt unsure about performing solo and sent a tape of songs to Boone via Derek:

He brings it back to Boone and starts orchestrating a band with Chris and Brian and Christian, around these songs. Christian came kind of later. He was in our running group. We had sang songs together; but, we hadn’t really played. So we put the show together and the band I’m supposed to be playing with cancels. We’re freaking out, but we play the first Naked Gods show June 16, 2006, by ourselves. People came. I think we charged a two dollar cover.

Everyone made money. I tried to split it up evenly, but I ended up making eighty bucks or something, some obscene amount of money that I didn’t know what to do with. So, anyway, Naked Gods becomes a thing at that point. For the four months or so we’re sitting down playing acoustic instruments. I was playing acoustic guitar. Derek initially was playing banjo and kick drum. Progressively the drum set got bigger and the banjo was left in the corner. Eventually, we started standing up or decided, “Hey, this sucks. We need to stand up when

we play.” That’s when we made a record and started becoming a rock band. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 05, 2011)

On their first EP, Christian and Seth split songwriting duties, almost down the middle. This recording featured two songs Christian sang during early Naked Gods shows. Seth now carries all of the band’s vocal responsibilities. Three-fifths of the band currently live together, hang out often, if not on an everyday basis, and pool financial and other resources. Christian and Brian share adjoining studio spaces at an arts collective on Depot Street, where Christian mostly writes poetry and Brian screen prints posters, t-shirts, books covers, CD sleeves, and various other projects. Three-fifths of the band work downtown in some food service capacity, and Derek does graphic design and web work for a local newspaper. In addition to sharing financial and creative resources, this band has spent years building relationships with people in Boone and now exist at the center of The Gods CoP, in which I include Travis, the band’s general manager, co-owner of 641 rpm, and booking agent for most of downtown’s more alternative, experimental shows.

While Naked Gods tensely resisted talking about their sound, my interview with Chris, Christian, and Derek took off as soon as I asked them to talk about the process behind Naked Gods performances, including songwriting, practicing, and recording:

Shannon: How does the songwriting process work with you guys?

Christian: It’s a very long process.

Chris: It takes forever.

Christian: That’s why we write a song a year, pretty much.

Derek: We wrote two songs last year!

Chris: It’s “a blessing and a curse,” to quote my favorite Drive-By Truckers album title, because there are five of us who all write songs. We’ve done it all our lives and we all have certain ways that we want things to sound. We all like to have input. We all respect... we don’t always show it the right way, but,

we all respect each other's opinions. When you have five people who have pretty strong opinions about a song, it takes a while. But, generally, a person will bring in a basic structure, usually some lyrics and a basic melody, and then we just kind of play it over and over and over again and think of ways to make it more interesting.

Christian: It's a pretty interesting personal dynamic. Everyone has things that they do well, and, I think over time that's changed and hopefully we'll continue to grow. We not only respect each other's opinions, like Chris said, but respect where each other are coming from as musicians. So, we encourage each other pretty well. We each kind of know what another person does well or what they're trying to get out in whatever they're playing. It feels like there's total freedom to experiment while writing a song and to play whatever the fuck you want.

Chris: I don't think we would work if there was a central figure who said "Christian, I need you to play this riff right here."

Derek: Right. If I'm writing a song, I try not to get too ahead of myself and think about things like that. We can work with something super barebones. You just have to have some sort of initial spark—a few chords and some lyrics and a melody. We can make something out of it normally. It takes a really long time and a lot of trial and error, but there just needs to be some kind of initial thing. Usually it kind of fails when, initially, it's really planned out.

Christian: Finding that spark will sometimes take us forever. Some nights when we're working on a new song, we'll have a whole practice and not get to anything and just play a ZZ Top blues riff the whole night. You know, those nights

where you work all night and you don't get anywhere, but it still feels really productive. It's never for a lack of trying out a lot of different things.

Derek: Yeah, it used to bug me. But now, it doesn't when we don't really get anywhere on a song. Because, like, *this is how we do it* [emphasis added]. Maybe it's because we're shitty musicians, but...

Chris: If we never got anywhere that would be depressing. But, we know that eventually, we usually get somewhere.

All agreed that musical experimentation, however slow-going, served the ultimate purpose of growing the band's meanings and identities toward purposeful action, idiosyncratic performance style, and an original sound. Earlier in this interview, the Gods discussed excitement about an upcoming album project and past recording undertakings as valuable learning experiences:

Chris: When we recorded the first EP, we just did it. It was the middle of winter and we were in this trailer in Crossnore and just got wasted and recorded six songs. We didn't have any idea how it was gonna sound. We'd all done self-recording, but never anything on a big scale. It turned out pretty well, but turned out being this lo-fi, alt-country feel. We hadn't really thought of ourselves that way. Well, maybe a little but...

Christian: We were a young band.

Chris: We recorded our album and didn't really have a certain way we wanted it to sound and it just kind of ended up sounding a certain way that was fairly consistent from beginning to end that kind of worked.

Christian: That was a huge learning process, though, because we would work on it every day, recording parts that... tons of crap... whatever we wanted to record we would do. A lot of it probably didn't end up on there, but it was just every day.

- Chris: It's a fun learning experience.
- Christian: Yeah, it is. So fun. Every day, it's like "What can we put on this track to make it more interesting?" More dense, or whatever. The songs greatly expanded when we recorded them which is what I'm sure is gonna happen this time.
- Chris: When Seth was doing his vocal melodies, we didn't know the best way to get Seth to sing and be comfortable. We tried bringing the microphone outside and having Seth sing outside, facing traffic. When that didn't work we...
- Derek: We'd have Seth singing with a tambourine over his face. We'd have Seth laying down on the sofa. We drugged him...
- Christian: I think our new songs are a lot more complicated than the last ones. So, I think they particularly lend themselves to being recorded and expanded upon. We probably disagree on the degree of complicatedness. We have five new songs and we are going to start recording them and be writing new songs as we record. This is going to be interesting, because we've never written songs as we were recording. I feel like we'll end up recording versions of the songs that end up on the recording but when we play them live they'll be different. Because, if we write something and record it, that'll be that, but later on we'll figure out more stuff to do. (C. Hutelmeyer, D. Wycoff, C. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2010)

Of all bands under consideration here, Naked Gods represents the most collective, slow food-like model of situated music-making. While familiar with and conscious of working within various figured worlds of alternative music, they demonstrate a commitment to developing band identities, meanings, and sounds from the ground up rather than modeling themselves after currently popular music trends. After five years of dedication and toil, Seth remarked:

In the way [our music] is written and the way we conduct ourselves, I think it is punk rock in the truest sense of the word in that we are doing something different than the status quo. We write these big, epic songs, which isn't really in vogue. It's not something that we really strive for. At least, I don't ever really go into a song thinking "let's make this as huge as we possibly can." But they always end up that way and that's fine. I think that we are just now developing our style. We're to the point where it sounds just like us. I don't think you can listen to one of our songs and immediately get what exactly it really sounds like. Maybe you can, but I've never heard a band that sounds exactly like us, which might be a bad thing. It's a couple of things mashed together, weirdly. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

Likewise, Kevin commented on the importance of embracing one's musical abilities and creations as part of oneself:

As much as I hate playing the same songs over and over and over again, it's all stuff that I wrote and it's stuff that I like. It's punk rock music that I do. It just comes natural. I can't think about songs that I write, it's just how they come out and it's just like—The Karloffs—is what I sound like. I try to write other stuff and it sounds fucking horrible. So it's just what I know how to write. It's how it sounds. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010)

Blue Sunshine, a project of Gods CoP members Travis and Mark, with Joel and Tim, also exhibited a desire to develop the natural musical contributions and ideas of a specific group of people over time:

The more we played together, themes sort of arose with what we were doing, I guess, and we would bring those back every time we played. But, I mean we had an idea that we really got hooked on ... we'd get together and play ... jam, pretty much is what we would do. The idea

was to record every time we jammed and then take from that pieces of music that we could use. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

This differed somewhat from Travis's first real experience playing in a band, with Mystic Condor Jug Band:

It started out just Eddie and another guy, Doug. Then it mutated and grew from there and at one point there were six or seven people. Various members of other bands were hanging out and playing. Derek from Naked Gods played guitar sometimes. Nate, Human Pippi Armstrong, played in the band for a while. It was a pretty loose collective, all centered around Eddie's compositions. He brought the songs to us and we all added to it. There was definitely a mystical, fantasy element to a lot of what we were doing, but nothing was really deliberate as a band, at least. We never talked about what this song was about, nothing like that. It was always Eddie kind of saying "This is what I hear the song as," and we did our best to make it sort of like that. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2011)

One of Travis's current projects involves weekly DJing gigs with Mark. Presently they perform Thursday night Black Cat dance parties as Small Wonder and OMI:

We've been DJing together for a while, now. We're kind of a package deal. He makes great music. He knows about rhythm. He knows about melody. I feel like it takes me a while to get into that groove. I'm more like a textural addition to whatever we do, for the most part. (T.

Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2011)

Mark and Travis rely on multiple livelihood strategies, working as food service, record store employees, and DJs to support the insatiable record collecting informing their practice. Not only do they choose music to soundtrack dance parties, they alter and recontextualize these sounds while employing learned DJ techniques like cutting and scratching records. These important participants in the fairly cohesive Gods CoP also extend their penchant for creative recontextualizing to images, as well. Their show advertisements are the funniest, most bizarre collaged show posters in town.

At the CoPs center, Naked Gods, at least, have become a fairly solid social unit:

We all are friends and we're all in Boone solely, absolutely one hundred percent—except for Chris who now owns a house and has a kid—but the rest of us are only here really because of the band. We were pretty stratified across the social wheel in the beginning. We all kind of hung out together, but there were like twenty-five or forty other people who were part of this giant circle who we knew and we all happened to find each other. Now, the five of us are pretty tight and have kind of become our own planet. Then there are other people that are around that. I think we all come from pretty similar family backgrounds. Especially, Brian and I come from very striking, almost identical family backgrounds—two Southern Baptist parents who are still married to one another, big families. Our parents live literally one mile from each other. It's bizarre. They don't even know each other, but they live a mile apart and they live similar lives. I feel like there were certain ethics instilled in us as children, like working hard and being ignorant enough to actually chase and believe in your dreams. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

While mostly playful, aesthetic differences did emerge as far as individual music and literature tastes. More significantly, though, some tension also seemed to lie at the heart of the band's creative process. In describing their songwriting process, Chris remarked that “if Seth writes [the song], we find out ways of putting more than two chords in it” (C. Hutelmeyer, personal communication, October 23, 2010). In talking about letting the music develop naturally, Seth revealed his lack of conscious interest in making songs so complicated, in the first place:

I don't ever really go into a song thinking “Let's make this as huge as we possibly can.” In fact, I go into a song thinking quite the opposite, like “Let's try not to make this song have fifteen fucking parts and a long ass ending.” But they always end up that way, and that's fine. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 05, 2011)

Already quoted above, Christian briefly touched on debates regarding the degree of complexity to Naked Gods compositions. Self-conscious about being considered alt-country, the band wanted to steer clear of such an association or any identification with the South. Seth, however, insisted that a mountain and working-class identity and background certainly influenced Naked Gods.

The Family.

The Family is a CoP mainly revolving around the seven-member Red Snapper Family Band who, at the time of this writing, appear to be on something of a performance hiatus. The band consists of a dynamic fusion between two musical families: the Adams and the Whites, both from Lewisville, just west of Winston-Salem, in Forsyth County. The three Adam sisters, Sarah, Hannah, and Caitlin, have engaged in creative and performance activities together since childhood. In the band's full formation, they are joined by cousin Charis. The White brothers, Crosky and Joe, have also played music together since childhood. Crosky and Sarah are married, while Joe and Charis are a couple. Brandon, the only unrelated member, dated Hannah for a time, and functions as the band's main songwriter and lead guitarist:

We started out with Brandon's music. It's all Brandon's music. At first it was just him being like "This is how it goes. This is how this part goes." After a while, he would show us the songs, but it would become more collaborative. We would give our input on what he brought us. (H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

While, perhaps, less collective than Naked Gods in terms of maximizing input from every member, The Family put a premium on musical communication among members during practice and performance. Sarah emphasized body placement and the importance of being able to see each other while playing:

When Charis played with us and there were seven in that little dining room area, we would all stand around in a circle, all facing each other, playing. When we get on stage, there's never

enough room for all of us and we still want to face each other. We need a revolving circular stage to take with us everywhere. We got a lot better when we were practicing in that small area, because, when we were practicing in Brandon's apartment, which was even smaller, we couldn't really get a circle going in there. It was a line, and it was hard for us to communicate. So, when we moved here, we got better, because we were always looking at each other. (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

While reliance on one member to write the band's songs may have contributed to the band's consistency of musical material from performance to performance, dwelling with the same material also helped the band perfect its original repertoire and made their sonic evolution that much more apparent. Over the past couple years, the band has noticeably developed in terms of visible on-stage comfort, volume, and sonic experimentation:

Sarah: I remember we played at the Saloon on Valentine's Day last year. We did some sixties love song covers. I feel like we didn't really go crazy that night, but that was the point when we were still...

Hannah: In between. . . Just getting louder.

S: Yeah, just getting louder. 'Cause when we started, we were pretty quiet and I feel like that night really solidified the desire in me to be loud. I just want to make noise; I don't care how pretty it is.

While members of The Family had relatively little to say about their process, they were rather forthcoming about their tendency to procrastinate:

Sarah: We are so last minute—"Ummm, I have some stickers. Hurry up, let's cut them out, write something on them, and stick them on a CD."

Hannah: "Here's some spray paint! Take some stencils!" While Brandon's in the other room burning as many CDs, and we're supposed to leave in ten minutes.

S: We're terrible. Do-it-yourself!

H: That's how it happens when we actually have CDs. It's always last minute.

(S. Adam & H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

The females I spoke with openly expressed their feelings about the lack of intergroup communication they felt their CoP presently engaged in. There seemed some confusion about whether or not the band was on hiatus, or what they were or were not doing, with different members simultaneously saying and believing different things about the band's immediate future trajectory. While most scene participants respected the group decision to presently cease playing shows and not inquire into the band's internal relationships, allowing for some group privacy, others were not so circumspect. At the time of this writing, pressure seemed to come from all sides for various members to speak for the CoP, clarify the group's status, and commit to more performances. Some participants expressed such deep disappointment about the band's potential dissolution that peer-pressure was certainly at work.

This situation exhibited an aspect of life in such a small scene that Travis alluded to:

Living in such close quarters, like Boone, you can't walk down the street in Boone and not see someone you don't know and holler at them. To a fault, if you just want to walk from point A to point B. You know everybody, whether you know their name, and if there's someone in town that doesn't live here, you know it right away. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

When anything changes in terms of musical landscape or a band's internal dynamics, gossip does circulate. Especially when so few bands exist, any changes in a band's performance availability does not go unnoticed long. For a family CoP of this size, familial bonds will undoubtedly outlast even more transient musical ones. The female members I talked to even remarked on just how quickly musical collaborations changed. More important than a singular band identity, the family seemed to adhere to a broader goal of allowing group member autonomy and doing whatever proved most fun. Hannah and Sarah talked about music as an activity that informed various members' personal

identities and enthusiastically anticipated that most would continue to pursue musical endeavors regardless of what became of Red Snapper. For other scene participants, the most upsetting aspect of this group's tenuous future trajectory seems to be the realization that even groups so bound by bonds as seemingly tight-knit and long-lasting as familial ones are not always so.

The Buds.

This CoP is the one with which I am associated in this scene. Compared to other CoPs this group is small—consisting of Michael and myself, transplants from Georgia, and two males—Mike and Scott. Mike recently returned to his hometown, Boone, after over ten years of living in Boston and New York. Scott, a frequent visitor to the area since family moved to Banner Elk ten years ago, moved to the outskirts of Boone during the winter of 2009-2010. Michael and I met Mike at a show that his band, Drug Ramp, played with Boston's Doomstar! in July 2009, shortly after 641 rpm opened its doors and began hosting shows. After spending six months hanging out, listening to records, and talking about other music-related topics, we woke up after a long and bitterly cold winter to wonder why we, a group of music-playing buddies, were not playing together. Though Michael and I performed as Piper in the Wood (sometimes with two electric guitars, sometimes alternating on guitar and drums), we abandoned this project to form Clover Buds, with Mike on drums, me on bass, and Michael on guitar. Practicing in the bedroom of our one-room apartment, we relocated to Scott's basement after our first or second show.

Michael, Mike, and I strove to create a collective atmosphere. We hoped to build this new project from the bottom up, developing sounds that naturally arose from our playing together and reflected personal abilities and musical preferences. Michael and I abandoned the collection of songs we had written for ourselves and other musical projects to create ones especially suited to this new band. We jammed as much as possible so as to incorporate ideas that emerged from this new

configuration of players. Jamming represented the most direct way our CoP explored the sounds that organically arose from communicating with and learning from each other.

Having had more experience in music playing and writing songs, Michael and I emerged as the collaborative songwriting team in this band, as we had in several past musical projects. Mike, meanwhile, developed his confidence on drums and used his visual art skills to make show posters and design cassette art. Once everyone started getting antsy about moving beyond jamming, to songs and more structured pieces, there seemed no other choice but that we would assume the roles we were most comfortable with. As Clover Buds, Mike made visual decisions, Michael gave the band sonic definition, and I provided melodies and words. We always went for a loud, minimal, repetitive rock aesthetic. All participants seemed relatively happy with their roles for a time. When these roles solidified, however, relative hierarchies and tensions became more pronounced. I became self-conscious about being the singer and playing bass in Scott's basement because, despite his protestations, he seemed to want to play in a band, himself. I perceived Mike to be resentful that Michael and I had so much influence over Clover Buds' musical direction by virtue of our writing all the songs. Mike tried getting me to write songs on the spot and made frustrating attempts at offering lyrical or melodic contributions.

Our music practice involved a combination of jamming, fitting words to simple song structures that spontaneously emerged through improvised jamming, and learning and remembering songs. Sometimes Michael would sing random words over jams. Often, we would record these practices and go back and listen for potential song material. Sometimes we would do this listening on the car rides back to Boone. Other times we would wait until later to listen and make editing decisions. On several occasions, who got to take the tape proved an object of contention. Like many bands, communication proved a central challenge. All participants hesitated in criticizing each other, suggesting that another member do something differently, or abandon certain attempts altogether.

Group get-togethers also involved listening to records and criticizing performances in various worlds of alternative music, but especially those areas of an individual's specific preference or interest and where these overlapped and intersected with others. As a record collector whose basement we were using as practice space, Scott usually took charge of everyone's listening experience, though he and Mike developed a playful competition over who would set the mood with their music. We all learned from each other and expanded musical understandings by participating in all the above activities. Even when deciding to go to the river or on a hike, time spent getting to know each other and becoming more comfortable always seemed time well spent as far as developing the CoP's collaborative ability.

Within the Buds CoP, an understood ideal of collectivity existed. We sought to make everyone feel comfortable and valued enough to share ideas. While we did not emphasize or value technical virtuosity, the limits of various members' abilities and levels of commitment certainly dictated CoP capabilities and provoked interpersonal tensions, as did more invisible elements such as trust. Where trust does not exist, creativity happens slowly, if at all. While I love being part of a band, these barriers to trust and the constant testing of relationships often tire me and make me feel less fulfilled, unchallenged, and less able to express my whole self. I inevitably begin missing those aspects of myself not valued by a particular CoP and often pursue a new tack or begin pursuing other projects, musical or otherwise, by myself or with other people.

During our formal interview, Mike talked about how individuals play differently with different people. Because he preferred loud and fast rock as well as performances with more of a punk attitude, Michael and I abandoned acoustic sounds and instruments to pursue a more rock aesthetic, as we had done with previous projects as collaborations with different individuals unfolded. Our somewhat haphazard desire to produce so many different sounds means that we change what we do from performance to performance and never recreate the same performance twice. This openness to different styles and sounds has its advantages and drawbacks. One obvious advantage is being able

to accommodate to play with many different types of music-makers from across the musical spectrum. One disadvantage is that audiences never know what to expect when performers fail to consistently deliver a similar or easily accessible performance. Nevertheless, we always perform whatever we are working on at the time, and, for better or worse, our performances always retain an element of transparency (some would say sloppiness) about the underlying process.

Transparency about music as a process, as an always evolving performance, an elusive spirit rather than reified “thing,” informed many of this CoP’s performances, including the blown out mono recordings and the several DIY cassette tape releases The Buds have managed to release over the past nine months. We attempted to model flexibility by experimenting with project configurations and exhibiting understanding of members’ desires to pursue other musical or creative endeavors. While difficult, I almost completely abandoned musical practice within this CoP during the months I labored on this thesis. Meanwhile, Michael launched an ambient project, Hickory Choral Society, returned to playing traditionally-inspired, original, improvised solo acoustic guitar music, expanded to play drums for surf band, Small Talk, and pursued experimental music collaborations with Mike (as Head Cleaner) and Mike and Scott (as Something Horrible). While not calling ourselves a collective, this small group of people exhibited the fluid dynamics I would attribute to such a flexible social unit.

The playful tension between the males in this CoP was not something I always liked or could easily interpret. Battles over what video to watch or whose record to listen to sometimes seemed good-natured, sometimes very serious and somewhat annoying. I considered myself a happy outsider to this competitive male posturing and negotiation of various figured worlds of culture—including music, movies, art, literature, etc. Despite my integral role in helping this CoP achieve its music-related goals, I, nevertheless, felt alienated by multiple marginalizations. While my gender surely played some part, I feel like my introverted personality and occupation with reading and writing were bigger factors in setting me apart within this group. It is somewhat ironic that my bandmates wished to call our cassette label Appalachian Studies Recordings. Our shared outsider identities within this

scene probably exist as one of the biggest commonalities between us. Despite having grown up or spent significant time in the North Carolina mountains, both Mike and Scott resisted any Appalachian identity and often taunted me with questions about what I studied. Their amusement, more than genuine interest, in my area of study caused them to use this name.

I did much less talking than the males, feeling unable to talk about the music they were constantly commenting upon, because my insights often belonged more to the realm of feelings. From my perspective, especially Mike and Scott held hyper-masculine ideas and often acted in ways that made me uncomfortable revealing my thoughts about music and other things of importance to me. Concealment of one's emotions seemed expected, or, rather, certain displays of emotion were privileged over others. While anger and punk attitude seemed acceptable displays, heartfelt sentiment and vulnerability felt, to me, rather unwelcome in this environment. It was neither lost upon me nor them that my submissive role in this group contrasted rather sharply with the responsibilities and skills I was concurrently developing and practicing through my graduate studies as well as with my front person role in live performances.

While less tension existed between me and Michael, with whom I have collaborated over a longer period of time and on multiple projects, we still encounter creative tensions. Whenever we collaborate alone or with other people, certain differences inevitably emerge. We still have moments of distrust, intimidation, and misunderstanding. Often tensions arose when I felt self-conscious about a song or proposed musical idea and wanted Michael, whom I continue to perceive as possessing infinitely more musical competence and experience than myself, to take the reins and tell me how to perform or elaborate it. He dislikes such deference, avoids any sort of band leader role, and takes pains to preserve the musical autonomy of others. Since he taught me my first guitar chords, he has made a point not to impose any style on me and allowed me to progress at my own pace and according to my own inclinations. Still, creative tensions can and do happen, as we try to play equal roles in every creative project we undertake. In this CoP part of the tension involved not wanting

other participants to feel as though we were controlling, though we do tend to unintentionally dominate the bands we perform in by virtue of our long-time musical collaboration and amount of experience and competence relative to other participants. Jealousy also occasionally rears its head when one or the other of us engages in creative collaborations with others.

In chapter one, I talk about language as a helpful tool for drawing maps of new understanding across the structures of consciousness that classify and erect boundaries within figured worlds that are much more complex and fluid than the limits delineated by linguistic markers. Music, like many things in life, defies understanding in any way that can be expressed in words. Music eludes meaning in any straightforward way and I have found that sometimes the people most adept at talking about and talking within figured worlds of music are not always those most adept at pursuing practice within the worlds they seek to be part of. In musical CoPs, language possesses the very real threat of getting in the way of practice. In my own CoP, too much resorting to language, too much talking about genres and criticizing the performances of others often detracted from the CoP's ability to execute its own ideas in practice. I know that I, myself, have been guilty of becoming frustrated too soon and prematurely criticizing jams and other musical excursions, instead of letting them happen and learning from them.

As I have learned through musical and writing practice, composition and editing are two different processes. One requires a tireless belief in building and continuing to do, while the other requires a critical eye for subtraction and eliminating the superfluous. Exploring chaos and embracing the discomfort of experimentation always lies behind the construction of the more ordered public performances. Creation and destruction are two aspects of musical learning involved in every performance. This central understanding is something I continue to struggle with in all creative undertakings. Conscious development of this process can strengthen a CoP. Alternatively, passing judgment too soon also tends to block CoP momentum and inhibit creative growth.

The Company.

The Company CoP consists mainly of members of Raleigh-based, ASU student band Easy Company and various associates involved with The Underground basement shows. Easy Company consists of two music industry majors Gabe and Kate—one in management and marketing, the other in audio production—studying in ASU’s School of Music. Other CoP members include long-time friends and associates, many of whom study in University College’s Sustainable Development and Appalachian Studies programs. Dylan, current resident of The Underground, represents the only non-band associate of this CoP interviewed for this project.

While Easy Company until recently called itself Easy Company Collective, Gabe describes himself as the group’s leader and chief songwriter. These roles were also evident in his description of the band’s creative process and evolution. Gabe related how Easy Company began in Raleigh as a performance group of about a dozen or so people. Under this name, Gabe released the band’s first and, to date, only album the day he left home for ASU. Gabe described his assembly of Easy Company’s present configuration:

I found more people and rebuilt it, more or less the same way, only a little bit different, because musicians here have different styles. The reason Easy Company is five people or smaller is I had found a new trumpet player, Charlie, and for the first time I had a very prominent horn section. He also played in Holy Ghost Tent Revival. He called me and said “Hey, I can’t play that show, or any show really.” I was on my car ride home to plan the show and went nuts. “I can’t deal with this many people; it’s too many people to depend on. I need to make this smaller. I need to figure out a way to do this just me. No drums. I’m just going to make it really minimal.” When I got home, Matt called me. I’d been playing with him for years in jazz combos. He called me saying “I just graduated. I have a nine to five. I hate my

life. I want to play music now. What do you have for me?" I was like, "I guess I can have a drummer now." (G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010)

At ASU, Gabe posted a flyer for a flautist and, in this way, found Kate. Not only did Gabe fulfill the organizational leader role in his band, our interview revealed that his musical compositions and conceptualizations dictated much of the band's sound and identity:

Gabe: In the midst of all that, in the past year, we've been recording this record. It started off as a full orchestra. I'm still working on it. I have a chance to take away parts I don't want anymore, and add other parts, make a combination of the both. I wrote a song called "Blue on Blue" before that first record was even released. After playing that song for a while, I was like 'There's so much behind this song and it seems like a grand ending to something.' So that song ended up being the last song of a five part series, which *Blue on Blue* is. I started writing more and more parts. When I went home for fall break and then winter break and summer break, I'd written all the parts, except for part one, which was an instrumental Kate ended up writing. It's more or less a five part concept album. It kind of tells a story. But, it's very metaphorical, so no one gets it besides me.

Kate: I get it.

G: You get it. Kate gets it. A couple people get it because I told them the story. That record is done for the most part. I just need to finish mixing it. One thing I learned from the last record is you never want to rush releasing a record and make decisions that you'll regret later. The worst thing you can have is a product that... "This is my band's record...but..." I don't mind that it's taking a long time. I'd rather just make it perfect, do the best I could with it. (G. Nardin & K. Davis, personal communication, December 16, 2010)

Highly involved, multi-part song suites and dynamic arrangements are the distinguishing features of Easy Company's sound. The band plays shows often, many outside of Boone, especially in the Triangle area of the state, where their families still live. They have built up a small following in Boone, especially via their connection to Dylan, a main organizer behind The Underground shows, and old friend of Easy Company bassist, Ben. Dylan described his relationship to other Company CoP members:

I've known Ben since seventh grade. When it comes to music, I still sort of hang with that crowd. We sort of explore the same things. One minute Ben and I will be jamming on the hardcore Mount Eerie album and then singing sea shanties. Ben plays banjo and now he plays bass with Easy Company. I went on tour with those guys. That was a lot of fun. It's kind of cool because we just glean these musical friends and they all help to build whatever it is that we're trying to do with The Underground. It's funny because I'm a Cary kid and they're from Apex, and people are always like "How do you know each other?" and it all dates back to middle school gym class with Ben. We never dressed out for gym. We were always sitting in the corner talking about music. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Members of this CoP have done an impressive job pooling artistic, financial, and technological skills and resources to book, promote, host, and document house shows featuring local, regional, and small-name nationally touring indie acts. In addition to acting as Easy Company bandleader, Gabe donates his PA, mixing board, and other equipment to personally run sound at The Underground events. Despite the private, networked nature of this venue, The Underground's homepage (not cited for privacy reasons) calls the venue a community organization whose stated mission is to "offer a unique musical experience, support local artists as well as touring acts, and ... support the growing arts scene in Boone, NC." In a more in-depth description, operators describe the unseen hard work behind the current space, issue a call for supporters to donate resources and support, and indicate the types of events the venue will host:

By putting forth tireless hours of cleaning, painting, and reconstructing what once was the dingiest basement you could possibly imagine, we have taken strides toward making this rather lofty space beneath our home available as a convenient, fun, respectful, and as often as possible, free venue for live music, art, shows, themed parties, etc.

Company associates undoubtedly represent the most digitally plugged-in contingent of the experimental scene. They have successfully leveraged social networking sites, but especially Facebook, for local show booking and promotion. Through in-person and digital networking, these individuals have managed to put on regular, well attended shows of anywhere from twenty to seventy people, filling an obvious need in the town's underground music scene. While Dylan recently began screen printing (he listed Brian Knox, of Naked Gods, as his role model here), the venue generally refrains from putting up posters downtown, a matter of keeping costs low and not attracting too many strangers: "Most of my promotion for shows is strictly Internet-based because I can't put up flyers all over town and invite a thousand people to my house. You could attract the wrong type of people." (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

The Company also represents the youngest contingent of Boone's experimental scene. Most are enrolled as undergraduate students at ASU. School is their main reason for being in Boone, and many do not plan to stay in Boone upon graduation. Most hail from the Raleigh/Chapel Hill area, and seem to come from relatively affluent, upper middle-class backgrounds. As mentioned earlier, many associates came to ASU to study SD and are concerned about issues directly related to local and regional sustainable practices. Many engage in agricultural activities and seek to support local culture, including art, music, and other outlets for creative expression.

Players and Their Performances

Different types of experimentation are involved in the various figured worlds and music-making processes engaged in by these various CoPs. All bands engage in some element of experimenting with putting sounds together, though some push the sonic boundaries more than

others. There are projects, like some of Travis and Mark's as well as Head Cleaner, that would really fall under the "experimental music" label. Often somewhat conceptual, this music seeks to challenge audience perceptions of what sounds count as music. Others experiment with elements of family, place, and collective music-making. While each CoP performed in vastly different ways, most conceded some common musical ground within this scene. Interestingly, perceptions of commonality differed widely from participant to participant. Before examining some major scene tensions and how differences in understanding and practice play out in scene interactions between individuals and CoPs, let us take a moment to consider the common threads participants felt bound their disparate performances.

An SD major, Dylan saw sustainability and cultural community as common concerns shared by participants:

I see just a lot of friendship. A communal aspect. People wanting to build up the community of Boone and make Boone get a little weird, to bring out the shy, creative people. I think there's a general interest in creating events and getting the ball rolling on different things, not even just music, but charitable stuff. A lot of eco-friendly sort of things going on here. That's another aspect of Boone, too: sustainability, self-sustaining creative community. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

While most struggled to articulate what it was, especially those participants who had lived in Boone longer felt intimacy, isolation, and amount of fun had differentiated this scene from others they had experience with or were aware of:

Hannah: Most people we hang out with now, we've met through playing music.
 We've played shows together and it's always ...

Sarah: We're just all trying to have fun.

H: We just have a *really* fucking good time playing music with all these good people.

- S: Most of us aren't taking it seriously. It's not like "I'm gonna make it and this is my career." I want to make something and have a good time and make people have a good time. I think that's one of the big differences.
- H: I like the places that we all play in, too. Like Dylan's basement, and Black Cat and Espresso. They're just really nice, comfortable places.
- S: Yes, it's a very comfortable scene.
- H: There's no stages. That's what it is! Playing on the floor and being with the people or having your friends right there, and strangers.
- S: I feel like we're all very supportive of each other, too. That's another thing.
- H: Everybody dances around.
- S: We're always going to everyone's shows and everyone's in a band with someone else.
- H: Yeah, we all genuinely like each other's music. (H. Adam and S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

Christian perceived the desire for a vibrant local art scene as the thread uniting this experimental music scene:

The crowd that goes to all those shows are people that make music or are involved in some other kind of creative endeavor. I've lived here ten years and, always in Boone, from the first night I came to college, there's been exceptionally creative and intelligent people interested in doing stuff and being whacky and having a good time. There's never been a shortage of creative folks around. I think those are the people who want there to be a musical scene, or any kind of art scene, in general. Those are the people that come out to things and have been supportive. (C. Smith, personal communication, October 24, 2010)

Travis agreed with Christian's assessment, describing this supportive core group as

“Hungry.” I use this word a lot when I talk to out-of-town bands about Boone. Folks who are really supportive of the scene here are hungry. They want to hear something new. They want to embrace different types of music and bands they’ve never heard before.

He, too, described Boone scenes as more fun, specifically comparing Boone audiences to Chapel Hill’s notoriously chilly indie audiences:

It’s always been a point of pride, I think, that this town has always been so engaging. Chapel Hill is a big comparison, as far as this area goes. You go to shows there and it almost seems like people are just too cool for school. They don’t want to move around at the shows. They barely want to look like they’re having a good time. There’s almost a point people make in Boone to have a good time. The bands here are trying to acknowledge that and feed into that a little bit more than other places. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Homesick for the larger, more vibrant Raleigh scene, Gabe saw little cohesion except for a collective acceptance of CoP differences and a shared desire for the performance of different sounds:

The only thing binding it is that there are few outlets. I’m from Raleigh where there are two separate crowds for my music and the music that Michael makes. They would never cross paths. That’s the best example. We all have something in common in that we’re doing something alternative and the only option that we have is to stick together. Here we would play the same show together. That’s only happening because we have to stick together. (G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010)

Likewise, Mike emphasized division over cohesion. He perceived too few overlaps in musical interest and too little cross-pollination between bands to consider anything currently happening a scene:

A lot of people are into non-mainstream music. I wouldn’t really say there’s a scene. You see the same people at the shows and stuff, but I don’t think a lot of people hang out with each other outside that environment. I think there could be [a scene] if there was a forum, maybe

an independent space that had some weekly music thing with different people getting together from different bands playing. (M. Geary, personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Members of The Gods CoP, especially, saw 641 rpm as the single most unifying force behind this experimental scene:

Now, with Travis and Kevin opening up the new record store—which is high profile in that it’s owned by two younger, hipper people who are out and about, who people see—It’s become this meeting ground. It’s something to unify everyone. People are starting to go to their store. In the way things work, you know, if I have the opportunity to buy a cow from a person I know or to buy a cow from a person I don’t know, I’m probably going to buy a cow from the person I know. Everybody that goes there is aware of things that are going on. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

Mark commented similarly: “We have different things in common. One of the major things, and probably how we know each other, is the record store and buying records. Especially since [vinyl] has made such a big comeback” (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011).³¹

Perhaps because she has lived here for several years and has accumulated direct experience with a wider spectrum of Boone’s musical landscape, Miquela seemed more reticent to speak about boundaries within and between the experimental scene and others. Instead, she chose to remark upon the unifying role of place:

I think there is cohesion to an extent— just the fact that it’s Boone and we’re all here. You have the old-time and bluegrass; and, there’s little cliques. I don’t really know how it’s all connected. I think there is some cohesion, but I don’t know if it’s just the fact that we’re all here. (M. De Leon, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

³¹ A simple Internet search provides several instances of national news and music website stories about the comeback of vinyl and cassette tapes in the digital age, especially in bigger cities. On its website, San Francisco’s Aquarius Records, for example, calls itself “the store old enough to think it’s funny that we’re selling lots of tapes again.”

In this comment, Miquela hit upon the ability of geographical place to put everyone in a shared state of mind. Though perceptions varied from person to person, all participants also shared, by virtue of occupying a shared place, an active negotiation of the same musical landscape. How performing participants positioned themselves in relation to the performances of others and understood the connections between various musical contingents and their corresponding figured worlds changed over time, as well.

While I focus on a scene operating on the margins of the more dominant traditional and jam scenes, the boundaries between these scenes are never clear cut; and, no scene exists completely independently of another. Dave Wood's (2009) examination of Boone's old-time community found that newcomers sometimes came from other figured worlds of music, like punk and metal. In this scene, too, many participants drifted into the experimental scene from the jam or more traditional music worlds. Travis noted that,

There are overlaps everywhere as far as what's going on in town musically. I think the thing at Fat Cats was a good example of that. There were all types of stuff going on. Everybody might not have liked everything, but you can expect that anywhere, anytime.³² (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Despite these overlaps, many participants felt that definite boundaries existed between the performers and performances in this experimental scene and those belonging to other scenes. As I saw and heard more within this scene, the boundaries Travis alluded to became more and more salient.

Contentious Boundaries.

Contested interpretations of "the show" and different understandings of what designated authentic performance lay at the heart of many participants' desires to remain distant from the jam

³² Six months after the fact, Nathan looked back at the Fat Cats September 2010 festival, once more, as the defining moment in bringing most of Boone's experimental scene participants together for the first time (N. Sheets, personal communication, March, 1, 2011).

scene and traditional music communities. Many ascribed to an idea that musical performers and the show, itself, deserved respect and that proper audience conduct entailed attentive listening. Though Gabe was initially turned off at the idea of playing house shows because of the inattentive, partying crowds Boone house shows usually draw, The Underground basement has proved the best, most convenient Boone venue to showcase his band, Easy Company:

Gabe: I care a lot about who is listening. That affects how I perform. That affects my songwriting, and that affects where we can play.

Kate: We aren't a bar band.

G: There's too many dramatic drops in volume and tempo and changes and what not. It's very demanding in attention. (G. Nardin & K. Davis, personal communication, December 16, 2010)

Seth saw the emergence of more "introverted" bands and perceived that perhaps

The tide is turning where there are more people in this town that are into music that is comparable to music [Naked Gods] do. People who are actually going to come to shows and listen to music and don't give a fuck about drink specials. They are not going to a show to party, but to actually watch music. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

The expectation of audience attention often translated to a negative perception of music treated as background:

In our class the other day we were talking about this. We—the entire music industry department—made a list of all the places in Boone we had seen live music. All the places, except two, were restaurants that had background music. That's not really a music scene. That's just kind of like "We want something in the background" or "We're going to play covers or what not." (G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010)

Company CoP member, Dylan, concurred. He explained that the types of bands he sought to book at The Underground should be more than comfortable background:

A lot of the bands we're hosting are not into the whole hippie, music on the mountain, kind of thing. I have my biases because I was into the whole jam band thing and kind of got out of it; but, a lot of music that goes on with that scene is like "What music will sound crazy if I dose up or if I'm wasted?" or "What music can be in the background while I'm partying or dancing?" Not all house shows are parties that have a background band. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Nathan elaborated on the undesirable notion of music as background as well as the desire for individual creativity he perceived to be lacking in more traditional music communities:

The jam band thing was here when I was growing up. That was the main music scene. There's just a lot of masculine posturing and less of an individual voice in that type of music. It's background music for people to get drunk to. Then there's Boone's old-time music scene, which is great. I grew up on that. The main problem for me is the lack of creativity, the lack of making something new out of that. Also, old-time fiddle music was a synthesis of so many different cultures—the African banjo and the Irish fiddle; and, a lot of those songs were born in blackface minstrel comedy. I think a lot of that history has been lost. It's sort of this idyllic, pastoral view of this type of music. I love a lot of those tunes, but I'd like to see people doing something different with them. (N. Sheets, personal communication, December 17, 2011)

I have heard similar sentiments expressed by other participants in this scene. While many possessed a profound love and respect for old-time and other traditional musics, for example, many felt too much romanticization and strict adherence to standard ways of doing prevented their participation in that community. While providing a regional identity and community, many felt such standardized notions upheld stereotypes that imposed too much commonality between individual performers and bands, while deemphasizing the musical and cultural diversity within the figured world of old-time music. Bill Malone (2007) described how mountain musicians from the early twentieth century looked to musical traditions of the past, as all artists do, but also listened to the

recorded sounds on phonograph records, bought guitars from Sears-Roebuck catalogs, and embraced recording opportunities, as well. One participant remarked that if Dock Boggs were alive today he would likely be purchasing cheap effects pedals and any other junk he could get his hands on in order to make the harshest, wildest, most electric sounds possible.

While this scene involved many participants attempting to reach the ideal of collective music-making at the heart of Boone's old-time community, a desire for individual voice remains. Such an emphasis partially stems from an aspect of indie rock/pop idealizing the lone auteur (usually male) guiding his attentive audience along some musical journey intended to impart some genuine emotion or experience. For others, however, the often overwrought performances of those motivated by such an ideal (i.e. currently popular bands, like The Decemberists, as well as much of the Merge Records roster) has begun a backlash against such claustrophobic, attention draining performances. The pendulum seems to be swinging, once more, toward a noisier, more atmospheric, less individualistic aesthetic that many in this scene would likely consider background music—albeit of a very different sort than that of the jam band scene.

More than the scene's dance DJs find the precious treatment of the show and negative assessment of background music problematic. Miquela and Michael both take to King Street to busk with their guitars when the weather permits. Sometimes people stop to listen, but for many this music is appreciated background. Both of these performers also play in restaurants, bars, shops, and art galleries where they happily provide atmospheric accompaniment. I have already made explicit my preference for performances that embrace minimal drones and emphasize the repetitious sounds that form the backdrop of our everyday lives, whether we notice or privilege them as music or not. I generally enjoy music that does not confine itself or seek elevation within the separate, socially sanctioned spaces of musical performance. While I do appreciate musical virtuosity, I seek that which moves consumers to contemplation and feeling about universal consciousness, while leaving room for multiple interpretations and actions. I dislike most performances that seem too overwrought in

delivering meanings or steering audiences toward one specific, heavily mediated, and over-planned experience. In my experience, that which many call background most easily soundtracks *doing*—including writing and other creative activities.

Placing musical performance on a pedestal by demanding rapt audience attention erects boundaries between performer and audience that often lead to a certain social formality and confusion about proper show conduct. Some bands seem comfortable with limited audience engagement and almost expect the audience to merely watch and listen silently, with arms folded. Others, like surf band Small Talk, often resort to verbally prodding their audience to dance. Sarah and Hannah expressed frustration about their perception of the subdued audiences they have encountered lately:

Sarah: The first time I came to Boone [around 2000], everyone was just crazy and jumping around, loud, screaming, which I totally appreciate. Every time we see Small Talk, I'm like "People should be screaming! Like, have you never listened to Dick Dale?" I feel like the crowd is more subdued lately in places we've been.

Hannah: Everywhere. Nobody dances anymore. It's weird.

S: Even in Asheville, Charlotte, Greensboro. These clubs have seating and it's like "No, get these chairs away."

H: If people are standing up and dancing to what you're creating it's just ...

S: Then I can dance. I can get into it more. (S. Adam & H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

Though participants were more scattered in terms of how they perceived the degree and importance of musical performance existing in the foreground of social gatherings, most participants agreed that experimental scene participants consisted of individuals more serious about music, its social role, and its meaning, than their jam scene counterparts. Gabe elaborated on his perception of that scene's non-specific, dabbling musical interest:

There's the "I went to college for four years and dabbled in this type of music and I grew up" scene. Every kid who goes to college, no matter where they are in the country, is going to get into Dave Matthews and whatever they get into... Phish and all that. (G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010)

While Gabe, himself, made music he considered non-specific to place, he has lived and played in figured worlds of alternative music all his life and will, in all likelihood, continue to pursue a trajectory within this realm. That experimental scene participants thought of the jam band scene as non-skilled or less serious music dabblers probably reflects more on the local manifestations of the jam world, where the audience for these bands are mostly college students interested in partying. Left out of the above comment is the distaste indie music has traditionally had for the jam band tendency toward excessive displays of individual musical virtuosity. Songs usually exist as platforms for performer displays of technicality. While recent times has seen indie music embrace musical virtuosity, harmonic complexity, unusual rhythms, and clever chord changes, American indie music originally came out of punk; and, many of its figured worlds still retain punk's more stripped-down ethos and disdain for anything too out of reach and, thus, undemocratic. For many underground music enthusiasts, jam bands represent hyper-technical, virtuosic musical performance, not musical dabbling.

So, while some vigilantly eschewed jam band association, others like members of The Gods and Family CoPs attended Phish concerts. A Grateful Dead poster adorned the practice space for The Family CoP and many other members of the scene qualified their dislike of the local jam band scene with an acknowledgement that classic jam bands like The Grateful Dead and Allman Brothers were, indeed, great. Others pointed out that some bands people wanted to call "indie," like Wilco, were essentially jam bands, and that much great music could be easily dismissed by some of the boundaries certain participants wanted to erect between the music they perceived themselves to be making and jam music. Jamming is an essential component to exploring and developing musical practice.

Unfortunately, I have witnessed several occasions in which the fear of sounding “too jammy” has interfered with the articulation and execution of a group’s musical ideas.

Neither could participants agree on what figured worlds of alternative music existed as directly relevant and meaningful in the present time and place. Because such interpretations are highly subjective and vary from individual to individual, suffice it to say that such differences do exist. Rather than judge others on *what* they listened to, especially those most associated with 641 rpm and The Gods CoP emphasized *how* they listened. Musical dabbling, in this case, was more linked to one’s patterns of musical consumption; depth of musical engagement was judged according to individual record buying and listening practices:

All these people are just buying records now because it’s cool to do that or everybody’s doing it. But that’s not even the point. I’m not so much into people who are into a certain kind of music. If they like jam band stuff and are like “I really like Miles Davis, too.” That doesn’t fucking count, man. You know what I mean. You know like, “Aww, man Outkast, Coltrane, and oooh I love the Stones, too” [spoken in frat boy voice]. That fucking shit doesn’t count for me. A little bit of obscurity here. (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

The assumption, for many, seemed to be that those who hungered for music embarked on personal explorations within a broad spectrum of music or delved deeply into certain figured worlds of music. Either way, this involved consuming the material artifacts of those worlds, and, thereby, supporting local media outlets as well as artists who create and provide access to that music.

In the twenty-first century, however, the Internet has shattered the figured world of alternative music. Not only are participants much more scattered in terms of musical interest than in the past, it is difficult for many to justify spending money on music that can be downloaded cheaply, if not for free. Local media outlets, therefore, encounter the enormous challenge of anticipating and understanding the desires and preferences of their clientele:

I don't even know what's popular. I don't know how to gauge that anymore, from a strictly retail point of view. A few months back Vampire Weekend had the number one album in the country. I don't even know what that means; because, we were selling it, but it wasn't like people were raving about it or ripping it off the shelves. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Ordering stock becomes something of a game of chance; and, stores run by one or a couple people with their own definite personal interests or preferences can easily be perceived as behind the times or severely limited in terms of merchandise. I have personally heard many comments about the obscurity of 641 rpm's stock and observed that where individuals feel in unfamiliar terrain, they often feel excluded and uncomfortable.

Not the biggest fan of the Internet, Travis discussed the many ways he felt it has affected the consumption and production of music on all levels:

The Internet has diffused the word "popular" because everything is out there; everything is popular. People like everything now. I think it has let a lot of people know that [non-mainstream music] is there. It's informed people that there is something there and that maybe it's kind of a badge to know that it exists. "Yeah, I know about that band." But, I don't feel like that equals support or even interest. Owning a record store and managing record stores for ten years total now, I've learned to embrace the Internet. At first I wanted to battle it, like I could defeat the Internet. I'm past that point in my life. I know you can't stop this thing; so, I've embraced that. It's a great tool for education and learning about all types of things, including music. I just don't feel like its being utilized in the way that a music lover, like myself, would use it. It kind of makes music throwaway, almost. That's why I love records. Just listening to an mp3 track completely out of context of an album, or out of context of even a band, just posted on a blog or a site takes away from what that band may have wanted to do with that music, or what they were attempting to do with that track. I guess it's the radio of

our time, really. People use it the same way. They hear a song and really love that song, but don't take into account the rest of that band's catalog. With the Internet though, everything is accessible at all times to everyone. So, it's like things become a little less special. There's nothing like walking into a room and seeing a band that you've never heard of and it actually *moving* you. You can't replicate that hearing a track on the Internet. Even if it's a band you walk in and you hate, I would much rather hate a band because I saw them live than because I listened to a track online. Hype is hype, whether it's built up in person or on the Internet, but when you live in such a small community and you interact online as opposed to in person, it can definitely be detrimental to a lot of things... to a tight-knit community of music. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Other participants, especially postgraduates and those in their late 20s and early 30s, also had definite, though ambivalent things to say about the Internet, including its role in mediating musical and other personal experiences:

There are dudes who sit in their dorm rooms on campus and read blogs about electronic and experimental music and order records from Amazon.com and have *no idea* that it's going on here. Eighteen-year-old kids who would be floored to know there are people like Mark and Head Cleaner, stuff that is pretty fucking out there. There was this really great show that Mark and Travis played in Mark's bedroom. Twenty people went. It was one of the craziest musical experiences of my life. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

While I have downplayed the role of age, a divide does exist between those who grew up with the Internet and older participants who remember the days of cassette tapes, zines, and the slow, usually geographically situated process of finding out about new, underground music:

Mike: There seems like a new wave of college student, kids who can't remember not having the Internet. Information is so readily available now. I know millions of fucking people have said this, but when I was younger, you had

to order issues of *Forced Exposure* or zines. You ordered stuff from record stores. You really had to look through fanzines and magazines to find out about stuff, and one thing would lead to another. It was kind of like this scavenger hunt. I think there's good and bad aspects of that. I think having to work harder for it makes it mean more to you. You feel like you're part of some kind of special club or something.

Shannon: How do you find out about new music, now?

Mike: The Internet. [laughs] And, magazines like *The Wire*. I still do research kind of stuff. Still one band will lead me to another. But, I can do what would have taken me months in the past in half an hour now. (M. Geary, personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Related to the above discussions, the Internet and music downloading has undeniably shaped the way consumers think about music consumption, creative property rights, and paying for one's entertainment. Long before the Internet, and as long as I have observed music scenes, the issue of money has appeared over and over again as the source of much social tension: between bands, among individual bandmates, and, especially, between bands and the agents who book and promote shows. A common story runs through music business history, touching mainstream as well as more underground operations: rarely can everyone agree on how and who should be paid for their creative and managerial efforts. Many participants in this experimental music scene exhibited a marked reticence to talk about money. I have several suppositions for why this might be as well as several suggestions for why such avoidance often proves detrimental to the well-being of any arts scene.

As in the figured world of folk music, one of the main determinants of authentic performance within this scene directly involves money: performers must not appear to be overly concerned with popularity, success, or the money accompanying widespread recognition. Viewers must perceive musicians to be motivated by the desire to express genuinely felt emotions and experiences and to

perform because they are simply compelled to do so and would be doing so anyway, with or without an audience. Indeed, most interviewed for this project certainly did fit these qualifications. As a sometimes performer, married to and friends with many working musicians, I have an obvious bias here: I am of the opinion that musical performers provide a valuable service to their local and global communities and deserve something in return from the consumers of their work.

As in many social scenes and situations, money, like class, exists as a topical no-no for polite conversation. Most of the scene's younger performing participants and their associates are ASU students, many pursuing undergraduate degrees in University College's Sustainable Development program. While I do not wish to generalize, many come to Boone from various suburbs of Raleigh, most notably Apex and Cary, and other cities in the Research Triangle. Because I, too, initially came to ASU to study SD, we share much in common, including concern for environmental as well as human rights and social justice issues. All these participants pretty much agree on the importance of building and maintaining the local capacity to pursue a variety of social projects to increase the sustainability of local cultures. One of the topics frequently discussed in my Foundations to Sustainable Development course revolved around economic investment and spending money where one's beliefs lie, or voting with one's dollars. Despite the willingness to spend more for organic food, how this idea might be practiced in an underground arts scene remains difficult to realize. For many young refugees of what is commonly perceived as our hyper-capitalist, modern American consumer culture, money represents a most difficult subject to talk openly about.

The Company contingent, in charge of hosting The Underground basement shows, does not share the working-class roots most of the more situated participants in this scene do share. On the whole, this group comes from more affluent backgrounds than do the older participants in this experimental scene. While The Gods represent the scene CoP who most proudly proclaim working-class roots, members of the Family and Buds CoP grew up working-class. Older participants who persisted in music-making into adulthood recognized the lowly, obstacle-ridden position artists tend

to occupy in modern American society. While still lovingly supported by their families, Sarah and Hannah openly discussed such difficulties:

Sarah: We're basically all misfits. We're society's...

Hannah: We're broke.

S: We don't have any money. We don't have any. We're playing shitty instruments, or instruments that we all got when we did have money.

H: It sucks, but we really don't care... I would rather...

S: I prefer where we are.

H: I would rather struggle and learn from the struggles than just going through easy. In everything, not just music. (S. Adam & H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

Many young music scene participants are not financially autonomous and remain unaware of what DIY means when one becomes independent of the financial support and security of social structures like family and school. For ASU students in the music school, DIY includes access to high-tech recording equipment and attempting to emulate the precise sounds of professionally recorded indie albums. For Michael and me, however, DIY, especially in the age of such high fidelity capability, entails obligation to lo-fi sounds and maximizing our ability to get interesting sounds from four-track, outdated mono field recording technologies, and whatever happens to be lying around. For less situated bands, DIY means throwing free basement shows; while, for more situated bands like Naked Gods, DIY means using connections to play local bars, snag paying gigs, and booking regional tours.

Many of the younger, more affluent participants also ascribe to figured worlds of alternative music that romanticize independence and deemphasize the importance of money to music-making. In addition to experiences in a Raleigh hardcore scene insisting all music ought to be free, Dylan provided another example:

Phil Elvrum, in Washington, lives in this house that has a printing press and screen printing studio. He is his own label basically, and some other bands. He's making waves in the popular music world, not just in music, but with the production of his albums, the artistry that goes into it. He's to us, an example that bands don't need to be tied to a corporation to sort of get out there. Small bands that have connections here and there can go on tour and can influence other people. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

Not mentioned here is how long Elvrum has been honing his craft, his long-time association with Olympia, Washington's influential K Records, and how such support has allowed him to currently operate in such independent fashion.³³ The Underground/Company CoP crowd are very influenced by a super wholesome, "twee" aesthetic associated with K Records, including an emphasis on communal engagement and reciprocity, bartering, gift-giving, and the idea that everything should be free. It also consists of a stripped-down, few effects, homemade aesthetic and nostalgia for more innocent times gone by. At its heart lies a certain romantic domesticity fitting nicely with many of the same ideas and concerns of those studying and attempting to practice sustainability.

Related to this aesthetic, The Underground/Company contingent differs from almost every other musical CoP in this scene in their level of sobriety. Some actively discouraged use of marijuana, psychedelics, and other illegal intoxicants that most situated participants in the experimental scene listed as sources of creative inspiration. Getting back to the issue of money, however, I have seen confusion and heard comments from touring bands about lack of compensation. At the last show I attended, featuring two Asheville bands, The Underground's emcee twice failed to mention anything about tipping the touring band, despite calls from the audience for him to make such an announcement. When such announcements are finally made, at shows or on flyers, organizers always take pains to refer to such giving as a donation, thereby eliminating much of the pressure or

³³ Formed in 1982 by the legendary Calvin Johnson (of Beat Happening), the label has since become a mainstay of American independent music.

expectation for show attendees to give anything. 641 rpm, too, hosts occasional free shows at their shop or at Espresso News. While still difficult to solicit money from the crowd while maintaining some semblance of audience voluntarism, these organizers are much more vigilant about passing the hat and putting on the pressure to pay.

I have observed music scenes and individual bands long enough to know the copious amounts of time and money that go into putting on a performance. It is nice when even a bigger-name band remains willing to keep their fees low; but, when audience members become trained to expect free entertainment and learn that they are under no obligation to pay performers, someone must pay the price. Often, it is the artists, themselves, who end up having to pay-to-play. Bartering and trading is nice, but the reality is bands on tour need money for gas and for food, fuel to get them to their next gig. Boone's nineties punks recognized the importance of paying the performers one books. In *Jesus Saves*, Matt tells a story, probably read from a zine, about an individual who booked a bunch of shows to give back to his local music community. Even though the young man lost, rather than made money, he, nevertheless, took it upon himself to make sure every touring band coming through received adequate compensation (W., 1996).

Class-related background and experiences as well as socioeconomic stage of life affects whether participants understand the importance of money in sustaining a band and music scenes, in general. This understanding also relates to length of time spent and experiences accumulated in less mediated (meaning not via the computer screen) musical interaction and situated local music practice. Those with less experience are always willing to perform for free and seem to expect those who have played their share of basements and spent much time networking, building experience, and developing competence, to possess the same willingness. As already mentioned, most performing participants will happily play for any audience who seems to genuinely want to hear the product of their creative labors. Because this often tends to be the case, however, music-loving show organizers are under that much more obligation not to take advantage of such a situation.

Especially in light of the high caliber bands they have already managed to book, The Underground organizers should consider the reputation this venue will receive once word gets around about chilly audiences who, on top of that, expect to experience a band's creative energy and work for free. Training audiences of people that they are under no obligation to give anything for their entertainment, in the end, undermines this venue's intention of providing long-term support to any local art scene. Many performing participants work low-paying service jobs in order to support themselves, repair equipment, buy gas, and other expenses needed to continue playing music in Boone. For these participants music is more than a hobby to spend one's extra money on; it is something to which they have given enormous amounts of time, their own money, and, often, a large part of their lives. In The Underground's defense, venue operator, Dylan, spoke to me about how he and his housemates are learning from every show. An additional tension he made me aware of was his frustration that the The Underground catered to the party/jam scene almost every weekend, when experimental shows discussed here were not taking place. At the time of this writing, Underground personnel were figuring out how to deal with the noise violation fine the Boone Police finally issued after a couple of previous warnings. (D. Thomas, personal communication, March 27, 2011)

As a booking agent who fairly compensates the acts he books and believes that even more experimental musical acts ought to be paid for their creative efforts, Travis represents something of an anomaly within local scenes I have personally observed and heard about. The more situated musicians in this scene regard Black Cat and Boone Saloon gigs, arranged through Travis, as the most lucrative performances, because performers always get something in return (even if only a burrito). He explained his high regard for performers and how he sees his own gate-keeping role (Mark calls him "The Sheriff") in building and sustaining the local music scene:

It's important that someone put these things together. I'm not a musician so to speak. I think about music all the time. I think about how it can be made and how it can be done all the time. But, I've never sat down and learned to play an instrument. I've never devoted my life

to performing. There's so many people that have done that and when you devote your time to something completely you don't have energy or desire, probably, to do any other thing.

Fortunately there is that thing of putting these shows together. Someone has to do it. You can't expect the people in the bands to do it, because they're there to play music. Some promotion is necessary, but, it would be nice if they could show up and play music. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Even at these gigs, however, the challenge of moving an audience remains and the tense boundary of audience/performer interaction often remains. Sarah perceived the Internet and the mass media, more generally, as having produced the more subdued audiences that Red Snapper has recently experienced across the state:

Shannon: Why do you think that is? Why do you think kids are so subdued?

Sarah: I think it's the times we live in, culturally. I know, throughout history, people have always been concerned about their appearance, but I feel like now people are just so worried about what everybody else thinks of them. I think it's because you put yourself out there on the Internet and put this picture of yourself out there. It makes people more self-conscious.

Hannah: Yeah. About the things you choose to say about yourself.

Sarah: There's just so much shoved in our faces from such a young age and our society says, like all societies in different ways, "This is how you should be." Even when there's a big group of people who are like "Fuck that," and "Okay, we're not really into that at all." Still, there's some people who want to be that way and have a hard time getting there. There's always a standard. I still catch myself going "I'm twenty-nine years old and I work retail, like part-time. What the fuck am I doing?" But then, I'm like "Wait a minute; I'm doing what I want to do." I'm hanging out with people that I love and

making music and creating little piddly things. I don't care if I do anything with my life. It's the process, along with the end result that matters. I think a lot of people just don't get that. (S. Adam and H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

Having re-activated my Facebook account, in large part to keep up with local musical happenings and this experimental scene, in particular, I concur with Sarah and Hannah's assertion that such social networking sites have made individuals more self-conscious. Such sites provide a visual for one's fragmented self, the sometimes disparate worlds to which one can belong, and the various perceptions of yourself that different individuals may have. My self-consciousness about fulfilling the various roles of playing loud rock music, teaching undergraduates at a university, belonging to a politically conservative, working-class family while pursuing graduate studies in Appalachian Studies, and having associates from all the above worlds meet in the virtual space of my Facebook page makes me too self-conscious to interact too much on this site. Sometimes, I feel like it also makes me more subdued in "real life."

Additionally, I have come to some conclusions about social networking sites as unparalleled tools for socialization, but inadequate engines for learning. Scene participants used Facebook to engage in some of the activities CoPs engage in: requesting and sharing information, coordinating events and resources, and seeking experience. Such sites, however, do not lend themselves well to discussing musical developments and performances, mapping knowledge, or identifying gaps in musical understanding. The way the site, itself, is structured actually discourages such critical interaction ("Like" buttons exist, but no other reaction is allowed). As I learned from personal breaches of netiquette, individuals do not appreciate when others invade "their" virtual space to challenge their understanding of a song, video, or other virtual artifact they have shared with Facebook friends. True to its name, social networking sites seem more designed for voyeuristic peering and exhibitionist display rather than learning. Virtual interaction opened up many

opportunities for miscommunication and proved much more competitive than face-to-face interaction.³⁴ Message boards, email listservs, and wikis seem much more in line with virtual CoP learning situated in specific figured worlds.

A recurring tension within this experimental scene involves charges of exclusivity, hurled by various groups and configurations of individuals at varying others, often depending on who happens to be present. Another scene commonality may be that no one escapes, at some point or another, being called out for consciously or unconsciously excluding others. Indeed, the very existence of bands, CoPs, and scenes, themselves, entail boundaries and definite binaries of exclusion and inclusion. More than any other group and, likely because they exist as the most situated CoP in Boone, The Gods have probably incurred more of this than anyone. Travis commented upon this perceived exclusivity:

I think something about the scene in Boone, that's always been cool, is how people embrace people. As much as people want to say it's an exclusive scene, and I've heard that from so many people—and these are people who just don't come out to shows, I feel like. I've heard so many negative things coming from people about bands like Naked Gods, about how they're an exclusive crowd of kids. That's bullshit; because, they're not. They're not at all. If you ever come to one of their shows, you are part of what's going on. That's always bothered me a lot. Every time I've heard that from someone, it's like "Well, I've never seen you at a show before. I've never seen you come to Black Cat for a show. I've never seen you come to Espresso News for a show." It's hard not to get really angry or upset about that kind of thing. It's always nice to see people that you've never seen before come out to shows. It's always

³⁴ A couple of films, *Catfish* (2010) and *The Social Network* (2010), have recently explored themes pertaining to the peculiar social interactions fostered by such social networking sites. Also pertinent to this discussion is Facebook's unsuccessful attempt to launch "Community Pages" in April 2010. Instead of asking for user participation, the site trawls the comments and status updates of one's friends for words pertaining to the specific interest, lists the number of "Likes" the topic has received, and imports an excerpt from the corresponding Wikipedia page.

really exciting. I feel like walking up to them and welcoming them to the fold; but, that seems almost like you are being exclusive, and you don't want to do that. I don't know how else to make people feel at home. You can only do so much for someone to feel welcome. They have to kind of feel that and know. They have to open up to be part of what's going on. You can only do so much, I think. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Buried in this defense lies an acknowledgement of some perceived favoritism in Travis's booking and that his priorities, first and foremost, lie with The Gods CoP and associates who have spent a significant time in or dedicated themselves to staying in Boone. I will be the first to admit that Michael and I have benefited from our getting off on a good foot with established participants, like Travis, from the time we arrived in Boone. While we have always been able to play as much as we wished, other participants may not have had the same advantage. The Underground house shows emerged because such a tension existed alongside a desire for different and more diverse acts than Travis had been booking. Rather than negotiate or wait around for opportunities, these participants created their own. The hard work of these organizers is both impressive and admirable. While many post-college participants joked about how these house shows, at first, made us feel old, this new venue has undeniably diversified and built the experimental scene's local momentum. This new development has also caused new divisions, however, with some individuals having become more militant in promoting their own CoPs and insinuating that individuals not present at certain events are failing to be supportive of the scene, in general.

Even as a musical performer, or perhaps because I mostly abandoned public performance during the time I wrote this, several participants seemed to imply that I should be less reclusive or was not demonstrating enough support: "Why don't you play more?" "Why don't you hang out more?" "Why don't you come to more shows?" This personal tension is one I am sure most participants have felt at one time or another. Especially among the less locally situated, student contingent, there seemed, similar to Wendy Fonarow's (2006) connection of indie authenticity with

Protestantism, an emphasis on action and constantly being seen *publicly doing* various scene-related activities (p. 183-184). Even in my interviews, some called out some of the scene's most musically active participants for being reclusive. Much division and suspicion existed between groups and individuals, and it was not unheard of to hear one group complain about the actions or lack of activity engaged in by a competing CoP, especially the less familiar two groups or individuals were with one another. Thankfully, most participants recognized that no one ever possesses a full awareness of the range of activities others engaged in and demonstrated understanding that creative undertakings often consume enormous amounts of energy and time. While reaching out is necessary, within the small community of Boone and the even smaller experimental music scene, CoPs walk a fine line between promoting local interest and engaging in self-absorbed proselytizing. Scenes, like CoPs, only remain viable insofar as they are able to maintain individual autonomy and voluntarism.

Behind many of these frustrating and tense boundaries, however, lies a deep seeded desire for a more integrated scene. Before a show in Asheville at which we were all playing, one participant stared at me and Michael and said "I wish that everyone would expand past their eight friends." The themes of longing for genuine communication and frustrated disconnection run through this scene. Sarah spoke of her desire for such communion:

Everyone is doing this experimental stuff and are really open-minded, and we end up gravitating toward each other. It's like here's all these people doing this thing, and here's all these people doing this thing. I like that. I like feeling like part of a group, but sometimes it's like "Let's just all... Why can't we all be doing this together?" I don't really... I get it and I don't get it. (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

Seth hoped the experimental scene's newfound momentum might indicate

A unification going on. That's really exciting. I feel like this year, 2011, could be a really cool year. There could be really cool things that happen; and, I'm not really concerned with people from outside Boone really taking notice. I want to see Boone... I want to see the

scene... the underground, the experimental scene... I want to see that whole fucking thing become unified. I want to know the people who play in these bands I've never heard of. I want to know them and drink beer with them. I want to hear their band play and for them to hear our band play. I want that to happen more than anything; I think maybe it will. I think maybe it might. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

Obstacles to such unification exist at all levels, though. While CoPs and bands sometimes seem less disconnected from each other and less transient than social interaction at the scene level, instabilities and challenges exist at these smaller social units, always threatening to derail the group. While frustrating as far as inter-scene interaction, lack of unified vision also effects whether a band is able to move an audience. Travis's insights proved especially important for understanding scene comfort and dynamics:

Travis: Black Cat was just a very interactive sort of space. We've only done a few shows there since we started booking again, and it took a while, at first, for it to get that way the first time, for people to realize that they could come there and be part of whatever was happening, not just watch. I'm hoping it will happen again.

Shannon: I feel like that's a very hard boundary to break.

T: To break that wall, yeah. It is tough. People aren't used to it as an audience.

S: I know a lot of artists who want to be really open to that, but that's really tough, too.

T: It's hard to engage people. You put so much concentration into doing it with your music, first and foremost. Beyond that it's hard and you have in-house stuff to deal with. It can be hard to engage your audience. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Too often, bands also possess short half-lives. Talking about Mystic Condor Jug Band, a tribal, beat-oriented rock band he played in during the mid-2000s, Travis lamented:

It was kind of shameful in that it started to feel like a band, and then we stopped playing together. That's the story of my life. Just when it started to feel like we were going to come together and, at least on my part, I felt like that was happening, we all went our separate ways and stopped doing it.

While he currently DJs regular dance parties at Black Cat, as Small Wonder, usually with Mark, the duo occasionally engage in a side project called Blue Sunshine, involving additional friends Joel, Tim, and Nate. As Gabe previously mentioned, however, additional challenges come as one attempts to accommodate and coordinate more people:

We had lots of ideas that never even panned out, unfortunately. Time was a real constraint. The desire was there, for sure; but, I just don't think any of us had the time. I liked the idea of what we were doing, the sense that anybody could come in and play at any time. I like it kind of open that way. I think it could always be a band, theoretically, even if we hadn't played together for a year or two, three years or whatever. I like Blue Sunshine as an idea more than a band. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Especially for those who have pursued music-making for longer periods, this presents nothing new. Most eventually face the reality of personal and familial commitments, tensions, and the necessity of making money. Continuing to pursue personal, creative endeavors often comes with much difficulty and sacrifice. Those who have persisted, however, do manage to devise ways of continuing musical practice. Commenting on the current hiatus of her own band, Red Snapper, Hannah focused on the positive:

It's kind of cool, though, because even though we don't know what we're doing because nobody knows where they're going or people are leaving or whatever... I think it's cool that even though that's happening, none of us have stopped playing. Crosky's playing with Small

Talk. Sarah, you're starting to do stuff with Miquela and Ben and Taylor. And, I hear Caitlin, quite often now, playing her classical guitar. (H. Adam, person communication, March 13, 2011)

While still saddened by the dissolution of bands, more experienced participants with prior experience of how musical projects form, change, and dissolve seemed more accepting of this process as part and parcel of the natural creative life cycle. Nothing stays the same; people change. When this happens creative interests and motivations often change as well.

Obviously many obstacles exist between the desire for scene communion and the social realities of building and maintaining a scene. Long-time participants of the Boone scene remarked on the inescapable factor of isolation involved in pursuing one's art in this place. Though inhibiting, some found this a particularly enabling feature:

Boone is an isolated place. Geographically, for sure, but in other ways, too. Boone is out of the way for most bands. It's out of the way for a lot of things. That's why I love it. That's why I treasure it. You have to make an effort to get to Boone and be in Boone. It's kind of a struggle. Yeah, it's a struggle, I guess, to be in this town, and it's very rewarding for that reason. I think the isolation here is part of it, and honestly I think that's why a lot of people can't hack it. For whatever reasons or excuses they give for wanting to leave, I think it is because it is so isolated and it's tough for some folks to live like that. My wife calls it FMS—"fear of missing ship." I think that people feel like they're missing something when they're in Boone, to a fault sometimes. It's hard for them to see what's going on around them a lot of times. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Smallness, limited opportunity, and the relative isolation of Boone present enabling and inhibiting factors depending on one's motivations, intentions, future trajectories and goals. From his own experiences with larger scenes in Boston, Chicago, Providence, and New York City, Mike reflected on some of the obstacles presented by such close quarters associations:

People like to talk shit about scenes; but, you can grow creatively in that environment, working with other people. You play differently with different people. It expands what you're able to do musically, creatively, by working with other people. Because it's such a small town, people are really guarded here and sometimes that hinders creativity. People are really cautious. Instead of putting themselves out there, they'll go inward. People are worried about what other people are going to think about them; and people gossip a lot, or something. I'm not really sure what it is. It's not an open, creative environment, I feel like. (M. Geary, personal communication, October 29, 2010)

Motivations, Intentions, and Trajectories.

Motivations and intentions are important aspects of musical practice to examine because they often determine participant performance, interactions, learning, and, ultimately, trajectory. The Gods represent a CoP simultaneously looking inward as well as to all that immediately surrounds them to find inspiration. Their website states that the band's music takes "inspiration from both an intense awareness and exploration of community and place, friendship, and a shared desire to artistically experiment and redefine their own musical boundaries" (Naked Gods, n.d.). Their intimate connection, energy, and desire to have fun comes out in every performance and has certainly contributed to the local following they have built over the past five years.

Derek: We're friends, and it's really fun, obviously. I think you can tell we're having a good time. We don't make music to depress ourselves. We want to be positive and make other people feel positive. That's one aspect of it. It's good to be loud and let off some steam and a lot of energy.

Christian: I think if it wasn't fun for us to play live, we wouldn't play live. If people are willing to let us go out and play in front of a bunch of people and have fun, we'll definitely do it. We've been privileged to be able to travel a little and

play a lot of places. It just feels incredible... a bunch of people or a few people in front of you who are, hopefully, getting into what you're doing. It's pretty incredible energy. It sends me into a trance. I never really know what's happening when we play live. (D. Wycoff & C. Smith, personal communication, October 23, 2010)

Christian summarized the collective process underpinning every Naked Gods performance: The way we make our music is a collective effort. There's not just one person who writes the songs and tells everyone what to play. We all work together, coming from different places, and trying to bring those individual places into the form of a song. There's a decided lack of individualism in our music. Hopefully there should be no part of a song that stands out as one person's thing. If anything, our lyrics might be self-referential to other members of the group. But generally, no one person's vision or story or anything like that. (C. Smith, personal communication, October 24, 2010)

While Naked Gods are underpinned by a very collective process, a certain individualism does emerge in live and recorded performances. For those less familiar with the band, or less adept at picking up on the nuances of band dynamics, Naked Gods singer, Seth, often appears as the band's most recognizable front-person. On stage, Seth, in particular, is sometimes very vocal about the virtue of involvement in one's local community and supporting local art. As already discussed, though, not everyone agrees that Naked Gods are all that community-minded. Bands must always walk a fine line between developing and maintaining the core music-making group, while also appealing to and directly involving a supportive community beyond the band. Seth admitted that the band retreated while recording *Welcome Home* during a lull in Boone's underground music scene, and that since then the band has become more of an island unto itself (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011). As bands work together over longer periods of time, becoming tighter units of shared experience and relatively stable CoP identities, an element of exclusion often develops over time.

Especially as this experimental scene has evolved past a handful of friends to include newcomers and more transients, charges of exclusivity have certainly come up. While having never felt excluded by this group, I am, personally, unable to identify with some of Naked Gods song topics and lyrics that possess much meaning for a large number of Naked Gods fans in this town. Though they may mean it more metaphorically, their lyrics, for example, focus on deep commitment to family: “I’ve got a mama and a daddy, too ... And, I’ll never turn my back on them again” (Naked Gods, 2008).

After the friendship they feel for each other, the band claims place as their single most motivating force. Seth spoke more about the natural beauty and geography of the place as inspiring:

Boone, as a place, influences us a lot. We’re surrounded by all this natural beauty. We live in “the old world.” If there was an “old world” in the United States of America this would be it. These are the oldest mountains on the face of the planet. I think that, moreso than being below the Mason-Dixon line or being Southern, being in the Appalachian mountains really influences our sound. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

While he also spoke about northwestern North Carolina’s natural beauty, Christian focused more on significant relationships and events that, for him, have unfolded in this place:

Place is probably the single most essential part of our music. Three of the band members all growing up together in a place not very far from here—Burke County—not even an hour away. I’m sort of displaced but, anyway, this is the place that we came together. We met each other, became friends here, make our music here, and live here. Context can never be separated from art, anyway. Our album is called *Welcome Home* and we practice and record everything in our house; it’s all really homey to us, and it wouldn’t work somewhere else. I don’t think, as a band, we could just move to some city, whatever the advantages are, and do the same things that we do. We all live and work in this community, and have for a really long time. (C. Smith, personal communication, October 24, 2010)

Other Gods CoP members emphasized place, too. Mark listed cabin fever and winter isolation as primary motivations for his musical activity and, especially, his tendency to create angry and sad songs. Like members of Naked Gods, Mark sought to consciously create place-inspired music that did not obviously draw on Appalachia's more obvious musical associations and identity:

I always wanted to make some music that didn't sound like it came from here, but I made it while I was here, and didn't sound like it came from anywhere else, either, you know? A lot of times when you hear some shit, or me personally, it's like "Where is that motherfucker from?" Right now, I'm in love with the beat scene from L.A. You listen to a lot of it and you can tell where it's from 'cause it's all mellow. I want to kind of create my own, because there isn't anyone else up here doing that. Then you're like, "Where's that shit coming from?"

"Man, this guy lives in the mountains." (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

Mark also offered specifics on how he incorporated the inspiration he finds in the natural and human-made objects of his everyday life into his musical practice:

Like today, I was looking out into the backyard, into the woods, but I was talking about and thinking about somebody that I know. I was kind of like rapping to the trees and stuff. I don't know... that was my audience. The trees were giving me something. I think so. It wasn't like "Oh, the trees," but at the same time, I was like "*Oh, the trees.*" I don't want to be a smart-ass, but trucks... My music is made up of past, future things, broken language, that doesn't necessarily have a meaning. It's like a scatterbrain. (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

What all members of the Gods CoP share in common is a commitment to Boone. While members willingly discussed some of the artistic disadvantages of staying in this place, they openly discussed why they chose to stay:

This town traps you sometimes, it really does. Sometimes it's like, "Maybe I should get out of here and make music somewhere else, try to start over and see if I can make a name for myself somewhere else." But then it's like, "I've got a name for myself here, and I feel comfortable with that." But then it's like, "You can always come back here. You've always got a name for yourself here." I have a resident DJ thing and I only work three days a week, split between two jobs. So, I kind of have to do that. I don't want to go anywhere. I mean today, I got to sleep until one o'clock, and I'm drinking beer now. To some, I may be a loser and not fulfilling my potential, but at the same time, that day will come. But not today [laughs]. (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

Mark's intentions to stay in Boone are certainly tied up with other CoP members' commitments to this town. More than any other CoP in Boone's current alternative music scene, The Gods represent the group most motivated by place and in possession of the strongest abilities and intentions to stay. A mutual support and respect exists among this group based on each other's active commitment to place and, therefore, to each other's place-based musical interests and trajectories. Seth spoke of the fundamental roles played by Travis, in particular:

Travis is the mastermind behind this shit. That dude is bound and determined. He'll kill himself trying to make Boone cool. I have so much respect for that guy. He's ignorant enough to actually chase the things he believes in and to actually believe in them. It's incredible; and, I think it's going to start paying dividends. (S. Sullivan, personal communication, January 5, 2011)

The Family CoP shared some similarities with the Gods. Like the Gods, they considered themselves a family with deep roots in the region. While they played music, they saw music more as one aspect of their group's creative life exploration. Several members are visual artists and seek to approach life, itself, as a creative work. Sarah, for example, believed music making to be connected to all other creative activities:

It's really all the same thing. What I want to accomplish with my existence on the planet is just to make something, whether it's visual or audio or whatever, something that makes somebody feel. I just want to move somebody. If it makes you want to dance, that's great. If it makes you want to cry or go "That's awful," okay. Just something. If I can make somebody feel the way I feel when I listen to something I love or look at a painting or sculpture that moves me... if I can do that for somebody. That's what I want and how it's all connected. (S. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

More than any other motivating reason, The Family practiced and performed music because they found it a fun, natural thing for so many creatively-inclined family members living in such close proximity to one another to engage in while hanging out and performing the other necessary activities of life. For Sarah and Hannah, anyway, fame and the desire for any socially conventional idea of success did not seem either a genuine or adequate intention:

Sarah: I would like to see any one of you guys go as far as we could go; and, I would be fine not doing a damn thing while you did it. But, I think a lot of people are just a little self-absorbed.

Hannah: Yeah... they want to make it big, be famous. That's what this society is all about: looking good, being the best, and getting really far.

S: And, doing it while you're young, really fast, because if you...

H: Go, go, go!!

S: If you deteriorate at all, then we're not going to look at you. It's all youth, and money, and status. (S. Adam & H. Adam, personal communication, March 13, 2011)

While at the time of this writing, the future of The Family CoP remained up in the air, with some members preparing for short-term adventures and others thinking about more long-term moves out of Boone, they all seemed committed to pursuing creative activity in some form or fashion. While

fun provided a strong enough motivation for this group for several years, the lack of any clear cut, unified intention or urgent motivation seemed somewhat at the heart of the band's current hiatus. Like The Gods, The Family CoP stressed the importance of communication, kinship, and development of one's craft over time and through the wisdom of accumulated life experiences. Though the immediate musical future of this CoP remained up in the air, it was clear that this confusion was part of the CoPs commitment to allowing its members to grow, pursue other life experiences, and demonstrate understanding and respect for each other's creative autonomy.

One of the surprising results of conducting these interviews was becoming more aware of how others perceived my own CoP's motivations:

You guys actually do seem more excited than most people I've seen, and not just about anything other than your music, seem like you truly care about what you're playing. I don't know, you're willing to do it and not think twice about it and be up there be like 'Cool, we're doing this.' That's what has to be done. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010)

On the other hand, friends in Naked Gods, a band very much attuned to the behind-the-scenes processes and interpersonal tensions underlying every performance, have picked up on times The Buds CoP were clearly not having fun, feeling performance energy, and/or communicating with each other. A concerned Christian once approached us after a show to ask why we did not seem happy with a performance that, on the surface, seemed to have gone well. While pursuing something creative and fun with friends has always been our intention, this CoP often struggled to find a unified intention. Various group members have always differed on several points including what Buds projects ought to or do sound like, the amount of time and dedication needed to develop that sound, and the visual aesthetic that would accompany our musical releases. Managing differences of experience and competence also proved difficult in pulling off performances and staying together, much less trying to engage an audience.

Those who watched Clover Buds and other more experimental CoP projects probably came away with the impression that we intended to be as loud, obnoxious, and sloppy as possible. While we have generally intended to be loud, we have always attempted to move our audiences, with varying degrees of success. While some nights we succeeded only in creating an unpleasant sonic mess, we never performed the same set twice. While our musical approach is not specific to geographical place, our philosophy embraces staying in one place, on one chord, in one key, and attempting to find and repeat something interesting and intense enough to transform the space and move our audience. We eschew harmonic complexity for subtle melodic and rhythmic variations as experiments in dwelling, exploring how to get the most out of a single idea in order to reach a place of infinite possibility and transcendence. Even our songs adhered to this repetitive, droning approach; and, though we did not emphasize the connection between drone and folk to our CoP members, Michael and I recognize drone as a common thread that runs through much folk music throughout the world (more on this in the conclusion). Although experimental drone music seems to be taking hold in the mountains, we realized from the start that only a handful of people would appreciate these efforts at this time.

We did not intend to be widely appealing or accessible to a large local audience, but to create the spontaneous sounds we wanted to hear and put on performances that were different every time. Even if we ran the risk of being “bad,” even by our own standards, at least we attempted musical aliveness and embraced unpredictability. We might not know exactly where we intend to be or how we wish to sound in two, five, or ten years, but I am certain that Michael and I, at least, will still be pursuing music in some form or fashion. Music has become such a natural part of our everyday lives that this creative activity has become one of the many daily activities we now practice almost as necessity, for personal therapy, without thinking. If anything, the performance hiatus I have taken in order to explore and write about musical learning has fortified my commitment to deepening my own musical practice and continuing to develop and advocate for the sounds I want to hear and perform.

The Company mostly consists of ASU students who may or may not stick around in Boone or continue participating in this local music scene past the immediate future. Their main members are music industry majors who plan to obtain record label internships in New York. At this point, these members seem to be pursuing music career trajectories in the now fairly mainstream music world of popular indie rock. Such a trajectory puts them somewhat at odds with most other performers in the Boone scene, including, perhaps, other CoP mates involved in more long-term local involvement and ascribing to more regional identification and traditional Appalachian musical interests. According to the Easy Company Facebook page (n.d.) the band makes the vague claim that their music is “created from the influence of frustration of not being able to keep our mouth shut and minds empty,” the opposite of my own CoPs intention to create from a clear, meditative state of mind and say as little as possible. While Easy Company ringleader, Gabe, insisted on this scene’s DIY aspect, the band’s actions, image, and intentions run somewhat counter to these supposed ideals. Rather than self-release the long-in-the-works *Blue on Blue* album, The Easy Company Facebook page declares the band to be “interested in people who believe in us enough to give us money to release records.” Their official website’s band biography (n.d.), repeats: “Easy Company is currently looking for a label for this release.”

While the band certainly does do most of their own promotion, networking on various Internet websites as well as in person, DIY for this band means something very different than for bands who operate on more limited financial means and outside the structural support and access to equipment provided by ASU’s School of Music. Whether its members will continue participating in alternative music-making after their parent-supported, college years, land music industry jobs, pursue other careers that will allow them to live comfortable lifestyles, or somehow manage to reconcile music-making with making a living remains to be seen:

Kate: We're going to Brooklyn. But after that we plan on probably going somewhere else. I'll probably always come back here once in a while, but I don't plan on living here anymore.

Gabe: It's really frustrating for me, living here, being from Raleigh, a place where I could see a show I want to see two or three times a week and where there actually is a music scene and something to do besides go to a coffee shop.

(K. Davis & G. Nardin, personal communication, December 16, 2010)

Other Company CoP members have expressed the desire to put down roots in Boone after graduation. It will be interesting to see in what capacity these participants continue to participate in local music scenes, whether they will find it feasible or desirable to stay in Boone, and how they will continue combining the principles of sustainability with place-based cultural projects.

Small Talk exists at an interesting nexus between several CoPs. The surf band includes one member of the Buds CoP, one of the Family CoP, and Nathan, who socializes across the entire spectrum of CoPs discussed here. While the band's songs emerged out of collaborative jams between Nathan and Michael, like Easy Company, the band's music and aesthetic are largely dictated by its chief songwriter, Nathan. While Crosky, the band's bassist, wrote and plays guitar on a couple of the band's staple songs, the band does not strive toward the ideal of collective music-making, and hangs out and practices infrequently. While Nathan frequently extols the virtues of collectivity and plays with even the amateur musicians among his friends, it is interesting that he recruited two highly competent members of other CoPs and established bands to form his only performing project. Now that the band has perfected a handful of songs as part of its regular repertoire, the band's leader seems somewhat satisfied with Small Talk's current sound and largely unwilling to take suggestions about new potential directions and ways to make performances more interesting from show to show.

With a faithful core audience and local popularity thus established, the band now occupies a tense crossroads in its future development and intended trajectory. While the band rides a crest of

local popularity, inter-band tensions become more and more apparent at public performances. The band is currently enacting the common musical narrative of the confused band pulling in all directions and bursting at the seams. Especially when several highly competent members find themselves in one project together, the temptation of ownership is a common internal disorder impeding further evolution and deepened practice. While such tensions do frequently result in band dissolutions, they also often produce memorable and transcendent performances that point toward the future directions and sounds for all involved.

Conclusion

For those who experiment with music as a long-term endeavor, having fun, experiencing genuine expression and communication, and engaging in lifelong learning often matter more than short-term attention or promotion. Contentious boundaries as well as differences in motivation, intention, and trajectory always mediate musical interaction. Recognition of these must precede negotiation across boundaries and toward the open communion all seemed desperate for. I asked many participants where they thought this experimental Boone scene might be headed. Kevin, the participant with the longest memory and continuous participation in Boone's alternative music scenes called this the "highest low point" in Boone's recent underground music history:

I want to be super optimistic. I want to be, so bad. I want to see people get excited. There definitely need to be more bands. You just gotta do it. And, it's not like these kids up here don't have enough damn money to buy guitars. When the Jesus Saves place started, there were a handful of bands that were local. But, then, there were tons of bands; and, out of town bands were more willing to come play and were getting excited about it. That was also making new people start stuff, which it doesn't seem to be doing now. I think people get confused about what a band is. A band is a band. There is something special about it, and then, there's not. (K. Freeman, personal communication, December 27, 2010)

For Kevin, the multiple divisions and suspicions in this scene directly relate to the lack of common space, a cohesion that the nineties punk scene arrived at through their communal occupation of the Jesus Saves storage unit.

One of the experimental scene's newest and most dedicated participants, however, seemed most enthusiastic about the future of this Boone scene:

I think it would be cool if people came to Boone to see music. That's sort of a really long-term thing; but, that sort of comes back to the sustainability aspect, the self-sustaining thing. It takes a lot of effort and a lot of people committed to that goal, and that goal varies a lot. People have different opinions about different things. I have kind of harsh opinions about certain things. But, I think as numbers are growing, as people are getting more interested in the local scene, it drives the city. Eventually that is going to create some major change here and that's cool because it's sort of bringing some identity to Boone, which will bring economy. It's all a big system. (D. Thomas, personal communication, January 14, 2011)

This hopefulness may relate to his staying in Boone for at least the next couple years. While he conceded that increasing numbers of students contributed to the sustainability dilemma, he emphasized his show organizing activities as his small way of trying to be part of a cultural solution. Those like fellow associate Gabe, however, perhaps more conscious of the limits of his own band's trajectory and his own transience in this place, took a decidedly different view:

I'm extremely biased, but I don't think there is a scene outside that small group of people. That's the only unique thing to Boone that's happening. The same thing could be happening in another city, but it's happening in Boone. It's completely DIY and I feel like it's all kind of happened in this past year or so. All of 2010. As far as doing anything alternative, 641 and the The Underground are the only outlets and those are very small. They've pretty much maxed out everything they can do on their own. (G. Nardin, December 16, 2010)

Coming up on having lived in Boone for ten years, Mark held yet another view, one that many of the more situated participants seemed to hold. Eschewing a concern for bigness or any type of scene growth measured in participant numbers, Mark emphasized dwelling and continuing to develop one's depth of engagement and artistry by staying in one place:

I think the scene could be a little bigger, but it's almost as big as it could be, too; because everybody wants to get this shit hoppin.' But we don't really want to get it poppin,' you know, because it is a small town. You can only do enough. So, I feel like [641 rpm] does great some days, it doesn't do great some days; and, that's just how it is because of where we are. But, it's building and building. I think everyone is going to get *better*. I don't know about bigger. I think everybody will definitely be a lot better in a couple years and still be reppin' this, you know. People move. People do things. (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

Mark's half-joking tendency to call himself and Travis, The Groundskeeper and The Sheriff, respectively, relates to their desire to keep Boone's underground scene somewhat guarded and small. It also bespoke their heightened consciousness about how their personal actions represented competitive gestures, advocating for certain types of music while guarding against others. The Gods CoP members took a certain comfort and pride in knowing that most visitors to the small mountain college town "can't hack it," in Travis's words. In addition to the isolation, the opposite also seemed true: many cannot live with seeing the same handful of people day in and day out. The insincere do not stick around long:

You see everybody here all the time. It's hard to put up a front and live up to that unless you are being completely honest. You don't front in Boone. You can't. If you front, you get called out for it. I think that's why there's a genuine feel to a lot of people in Boone. I think people who live in Boone get that impression. If you're talking to someone, there are no walls. There are no liars in Boone. They don't stick around. If you don't fit in, you know it pretty quickly;

and, it's not a matter of how you dress or how cool you are or what you know, it's how genuine you are. If you are not a genuine person, then you don't fit in in Boone; and, maybe that's why some people feel like it is an exclusive scene. (T. Reyes, personal communication, October 5, 2010)

Those who have chosen to stay in Boone long-term agreed that integration happens over time, not through forced effort. Christian spoke about the role of time, isolation and the slow pace accompanying creative activity as well as the building of personal connections, inter-scene momentum, and intra-scene bridges:

It definitely takes time for a scene or a community to come together and find itself. Things around here happen really slowly. I really hope that as more time passes, we'll all do more things together and just kind of build on a momentum that, to me, seems like it's just really beginning to get off the ground and maybe define itself, very slowly. There's probably really a couple scenes that really don't meet up in the middle. But, I think, the group of people that we all know definitely does, or maybe is hopefully starting to more.

While frustrating to those from more quicker-paced scenes, those who call this place home appreciate and, even, revel in those aspects from which others seek escape. Christian wished to conclude by reiterating this point about the place in which he and his CoP have found enough inspiration to continue living their lives and honing their practice for the foreseeable future:

Things happen really slow around here. Everyone sort of does their thing; and, life seems to move slowly. So, I think establishing lines of discourse maybe takes longer than it should. While there are a lot of creative people who interact, I don't think there's any kind of purposeful exclusivity. I definitely have a space [at The Collective on Depot Street] because of people I knew and doing things that those people knew about. So, I kind of had an inroad into that. It might be that here it is harder to break into things because maybe you have to

make a lot of connections. But, maybe it's like that anywhere. I'm sure it is. (C. Smith, personal communication, October 24, 2010)

CONCLUSION

Aside from my early hypothesis that participants were actively engaged in constructing a single collective identity, all the basic elements of my anticipated findings held up under analysis. Learning did happen as a dynamic push and pull of cooperation and competition on all levels of interaction. More cooperation did exist at the CoP level, while scene level cooperation represented successful articulations of shared understandings and collective cultural goals. Scene boundaries did break down and become more inclusive with increased inter-scene and intra-scene opportunities for musical interaction. Additionally, the desire to dissolve barriers and expand elusive divisions, especially between participants within the experimental scene, was a desire most shared. Over the course of my participant observation, I began to see this desire as the force behind my own initial temptation to focus on collective identity where no such thing existed.

While most participants spoke of the local need for more commons space, many did not fully appreciate or utilize existing spaces and the local manifestations of the figured world of alternative musics already in place in downtown Boone. Where tensions and hierarchies emerged, many opted to make their own, rather than build the momentum of what was perceived as someone else's project. The Internet, in particular, has eliminated the necessity of using such local resources (including the often knowledgeable and passionate people who staff them) to find out or learn more about musical worlds. While media outlets, like 641 rpm and Fat Cats Books, Music, and Video, continue to present enabling opportunities for the local experimental scene, Holly Kruse (2010) noted that "as internet options for the discussion and sharing of indie music increase, the local spaces devoted to interaction around music are changing and sometimes disappearing" (p. 625). Still, these spaces persist because they provide valuable opportunities for meaningful incorporation of music into everyday practice and

learning about contemporary and historical figured worlds of alternative music beyond the specific range of one's comfort and familiarity.

Coming from Macon, where no independent record shop exists, I am acutely aware of the importance of such media outlets to the vibrancy of a scene. Core participants in that local underground music scene are desperately trying to open up such an outlet. Many recognize the pivotal role such a space plays in inter-scene development as well as connecting a local scene to other local, regional, and national networks of alternative music. Many participants do talk about the exclusivity and obscurity of such institutions in Boone, using these as excuses for not supporting the few learning resources music-loving participants have privileged access to. As evidenced by the words of interviewees, though, charges of exclusivity tend to diminish as trust and understanding build over time. The participants most acceptant of others, including the jam band and old-time scenes, were those who had lived and performed in Boone for longer periods of time, who took advantage of local resources and did not draw such clear-cut boundaries, and who understood the long-term nature of scene building. These individuals generally had more personal connections and frequent interactions with participants across Boone's music spectrum as well as reasons for pursuing less rigid boundaries between these more locally entrenched scenes and the experimental music they sought to create.

Perceptions of exclusivity had more to do with a group's desire to feel included in the local scene before having spent the requisite time cooperating with and interacting with more established participants in the various figured worlds of local alternative music. Especially where ASU student bands or CoPs sought entry into a more place-based scene than the student-oriented jam scene, tensions often arose. Long-time participants guarded their turf, while newcomers' perception of the exclusivity of more situated others led them to explore alternative options, including leveraging the social networking power of Facebook, in particular, that older, more situated participants have, up until now, partially shunned. The Internet plays a prominent role within certain contingents of this scene and represents one of the biggest differences between how younger and older participants

perceive the rules of musical engagement and local interaction. Many participants, just a few years younger than me, cannot remember life without the Internet or easy, often free, music downloading. While possessing obvious disadvantages, online interaction also seems to foster increased intimacy in the sense that participants seem more aware and able to keep track of each other's many events and the personal activities and details of more people. Older participants have become aware that they can no longer ignore the power of online social networking for booking and promoting shows as well as building scene momentum. Whether or not and to what degree older and younger participants will learn from and listen to each other in order to take advantage of the valuable lessons and insights gained from disparate experiences, however, remains to be seen.

Charges pertaining to the musical obscurity of others deal more with the wide and shattered figured worlds alternative music-lovers experience today. Those who commented on the obscurity of 641 rpm's selection, for example, seemed the same people most insecure about worlds of music beyond the boundaries of that which they were most familiar. Even the most dedicated music enthusiasts and vinyl record collectors recognized the limits of their knowledge with regard to the wide world of music. No one can ever know everything, and the more you know about, the more you realize you do not know. Those most passionate about learning through music utilized record stores as hubs for learning. Through such situated interaction, they also became comfortable with the understanding that there is always something more to hear and learned to talk about music in less competitive, more sharing, ways. As in any cultural domain, learning entails challenging oneself to expand beyond one's current horizons.

In the Information Age, a seemingly infinite amount of information rests at the tips of one's fingers. Access to all information is not equal, however, and the way individuals navigate the Internet remains pre-programmed by certain structures, steering searchers in paths toward certain music and away from others (i.e. big indie music review sites, like Pitchfork, dictate much of what a large percentage of indie fans know about underground music). A record store with new and used

merchandise, on the other hand, often exists as a place where more haphazard exploration and surprising musical discoveries can happen. The Internet's seemingly endless power and scope proves deceptive when participants realize the way this technology, with the potential to uncover so much, often prohibits deeper understanding and becomes subject to abuse. One of the interesting interactions I have noticed over the course of this fieldwork is the preference some participants have for communicating via the Internet. Instead of walking into a record store, talking to a person, and browsing through what happens to be there, some use Facebook as a forum for recommending that a store order a certain item or making stock inquiries.

In chapter three we examined how the desire to appropriate and play with Appalachian and folk identity recently captivated a segment of the American indie music world at a time when the nation most needed alternative and comforting ways to perceive itself—its cultural projects and worldview. In many ways, I feel I came to Boone because I unconsciously fell in love with all three aspects of a romantic and perennial Appalachian identity: folklife, nature, and poverty. In the beginning, I knew not how invented, stereotypical, and problematic these popular images and associations were. In the process of seeking to understand what and where Appalachia is, I felt an internal objection to Appalachia as any reified *thing* or identity in need of preservation or protection. I keenly felt many of the boundaries that excluded me from ever being considered a genuine participant in what most considered Appalachian, even within the Appalachian Studies program. From my first excursion in the field, my dark hair and complexion automatically marked me as an outsider. I am not particularly domestic or socially-inclined. I do not care to listen to bluegrass. While I like the many sounds of old-time genres, I am not willing to play solely, or even primarily, in that world.

Many contemporary Appalachians do not fit these stereotypes either, though many embody working-class identities, religious affiliations, and worldviews dissonant with the supposed mainstream. In a process that was simultaneously a search for Appalachian identity as well as my own personal one, I found that more than anything, Appalachia represented diverse possibilities and

alternative visions for a globalized people and planet. What I found underlying all the disparate worlds I participated in was a desire for sustainability and a passionate search for alternatives to our current ways of acting in and viewing the world we share. Those interested in art and music sought performances directly relevant to such issues and experimented with ways of moving others toward creative being, engaged grassroots participation, and cultural community. Many more opportunities remain for expanding contemporary notions of what now constitutes alternative, grassroots culture, including music, no matter what its outer performance trappings or supposed genre classifications. In Holly Kruse's (2003) study of independent music scenes, she quoted an Urbana-Champaign, Illinois record store employee who remarked that alternative music:

Could be anything from the [Chicago independent] Touch and Go label . . . [but] there's a lot of international students, there's a lot of students from Africa that come in and buy African music. That's an alternative music. (p. 8)

There are opportunities to expand beyond the somewhat whitewashed influences this experimental scene adheres to as alternatives to mainstream music. If participants desire music touching upon the major political issues of our late modern time—including sustainability's emphasis on place-based engagement—much more can be found beyond the confines of the currently popular indie music mainstream or somewhat nostalgic forays into the supposedly untainted roots of rock 'n' roll. While firmly rooted in the past, the music of the future will refuse to dwell in it.

Because this project sought to explore the links between Appalachian identity and an American indie music that emerged out of punk (a movement itself undeniably born of a mostly white, male, suburban experience and desire for an authentic culture to call its own), this thesis possesses an unavoidable and decidedly white, rock bias. When we arrived in Boone in spring 2009, occasional hip hop shows happened at places, like the no longer in business Dragonfly Theater; and, 641 rpm still hosts such shows, from time to time, with artists from out of town. Furthermore, some

elements of this figured world's culture, like graffiti and skateboarding, exist.³⁵ Boone, however, does not possess any experimental/indie hip hop scene. For the most part, those interested in the figured worlds of mainstream and indie hip hop go to Southern cities like Atlanta, Memphis, and Houston, just as individuals interested in Appalachian or folk music come to western North Carolina. It is also significant that those who participated in the figured worlds of hip hop elsewhere often abandoned such activities upon coming to Boone. Mark, for example, said:

I do instrumental stuff now, whereas I would have just made beats to rap over. I was just like "Not everything needs to have vocals over it," you know? And, a lot of people I know don't rap, so it was like, "I don't want to be rapping all the time." Even though people like it, or they say they do; they really don't. (M. Welsh, personal communication, January 19, 2011)

Likewise, Scott, from my own CoP, moved from Miami where he made beats, sometimes for rapper friends. Despite encouragement from scene participants, like Mark and Travis, Scott has mostly stopped making beats, preferring to pursue playing bass and making rock music since moving to Boone.

The lack of a hip hop scene exists as one significant difference between Boone's experimental music scene and Macon's current underground music scene. In Macon, a vibrant and fluid indie hip hop scene exists. Artists in this world often collaborate and play shows with more rock-oriented musicians. Furthermore, Grant's Lounge, the same interracial, Poplar Avenue club that welcomed the locally scandalous Allman Brothers and other Capricorn Records artists starting in the early seventies, continues to provide an enabling forum for Macon's contemporary interracial underground scene (Grant's Lounge, n.d.). That so little support or interest exists for these figured

³⁵ Even graffiti and skateboarding, however, have become much curtailed by the strict enforcement of local laws, as Boone has become more gentrified. I knew of one individual who, unwilling to pay the fine or do jail time, eventually left town over a graffiti-related incident. He was also investigating ways to use stencils and moss to create environmentally friendly, living graffiti, an increasingly popular type of street art and guerilla gardening.

worlds of music in Boone's contemporary experimental scene likely relates to the self-consciousness many participants (who we have already established are mostly white) possess about appropriating soul, funk, jazz, reggae, dub, hip hop, and other elements of more black and/or urban culture that they cannot authentically claim. That many jam bands and their college audiences freely do so without such self-consciousness or deep understanding of the cultures and musics being appropriated further discourages experimental scene participants from incorporating such influences or emphasizing such connections.

As we close out the first decade of a new century, however, opportunities for new musical connections and recontextualizations abound. I have already mentioned Southern rap, hip hop, and other popular urban styles as the folk musics of our time. As drone establishes more of a presence in Appalachia, many individuals are also beginning to understand the drone as a thread that runs through folk music the world round, from the hypnotic "trance and drone" styles of Mississippi hill country blues musicians, like Junior Kimbrough, R.L. Burnside, and Jessie Mae Hemphill, to the cosmic vocalizations of Pandit Pran Nath (Stevens, 2003). More recently, Kruse (2010) referenced John Connell and Chris Gibson's *Sound tracks: Popular Music, Identity and Place* (2002) to point out that while the Internet has done much to liberate scenes from the confines of geographic locales, it has also "likely accelerated the process of regional, national, and international sounds and practices interacting with local music" (p. 630). Global figured worlds (what Connell and Gibson call "imagined communities") of shared interest, unbound by geography, coexist at the local level in the actions and interests of individual participants. Twenty-first century music enthusiasts now explore and perform widely disparate global influences, with many seizing newfound opportunities for widening the scope of alternative music beyond the Western aesthetics and sounds of an American and British dominated indie music empire.

In a recent *Old-Time Herald* article about Atlanta-based label Dust-to-Digital, old-time musician and writer Bruce Miller (2010) remarked that developments in

New technology also allowed compilers to re-examine the *context* in which music was re-sold to a public not even alive when the original sides were actually recorded, pressed, and distributed. Now there were potentially new ways of listening to the old music, due not only to the fact that the popularity of indie rock, noise, outsider artists, and alt country have allowed younger folks to soak it up with ears attuned to things preceding generations had never been exposed to, but also because, nearly a century later, the best of this stuff has only become more radically ageless. (p. 15)

Begun in the 1990s, when Lance Ledbetter began hosting a radio show of pre-War folk and blues on Georgia State University's WRAS station, the label debuted with an innovative and sprawling six-CD compilation project, *Goodbye, Babylon* (2003) and has since boasted such diverse, award-winning compilations as

a disc of Tuvan overtone throat singing recorded in 1969, long before Tuva became the republic it is today; a CD devoted to shape note singing; a DVD and a CD focusing on Joe Bussard, as well as a now-out-of-print collection of the output of Bussard's own Fonotone label, perhaps the last 78 RPM label in the US. (Miller, 2010, p. 18)

Initially inspired by the unorthodox compilation methods of Harry Smith, the label's high quality releases rely on the extensive musical knowledge, personal collections, old and new field recordings, and compilation ideas of a handful of folk music luminaries like Joe Bussard, Dick Spottswood, and Art Rosenbaum.

Sublime Frequencies, based out of Seattle, Washington, provides another good example.

They describe themselves as:

A collective of explorers dedicated to acquiring and exposing obscure sights and sounds from modern and traditional urban and rural frontiers via film and video, field recordings, radio and short wave transmissions, international folk and pop music, sound anomalies, and other forms of human and natural expression not documented sufficiently through all channels of

academic research, the modern recording industry, media, or corporate foundations Sublime Frequencies is focused on an aesthetic of extra-geography, and soulful experience inspired by music and culture, world travel, research, and the pioneering recording labels of the past including Ocora, Smithsonian Folkways, Ethnic Folkways, Lyrichord, Nonesuch Explorer, ... (Sublime Frequencies, n.d.)

Group Doueh, one of the currently popular touring acts on the label's roster, have become a worldwide underground phenomenon playing psychedelic guitar sounds. While relevant to contemporary indie music, their performances are cultural expressions of their Western Saharan homeland. The Sublime Frequencies site (n.d.) describes the group as consisting of family and friends who come together to create an "ancient/modern sound ... rooted in the traditional foundations of Sahrawi/Hassania music, but tak[ing] it in a direction that is almost entirely its own."

Similar to Sublime Frequencies, the Portland, Oregon-based Mississippi Records compiles dissonant strains of American music, from old blues and jazz to Greek folk in New York City. The label also releases new artists, like Evolutionary Jass Band and Marisa Anderson, who recontextualize and recombine elements of international folk and popular music (Sinclair, 2009). Founded in 2003, Numero Group also releases compilations that treat the urban music of the sixties and seventies as folk music. The label describes its catalog as a "modest miracle of localized sound creation, shedding fresh light on the efforts of men and women who sang, played, recorded and peddled to shallow rewards, if any." They described their assorted compilation series in this way:

Eccentric Soul, our flagship series, has documented lovingly mishandled soul labels from Columbus, Chicago, Detroit, St. Louis, Phoenix, Atlanta, and Miami. Our Wayfaring Strangers compilations collect the privately issued song-fruits of wandering folkies. Each Cult Cargo release visits the sonic shores of some tiny, isolated nation, while Good God! titles seek the spiritual, as enshrined on reels of audio tape neglected until now. And with Local Customs we investigate isolated, mom-and-pop recording outfits, each operated by a

homespun Alan Lomax who gave neighbors and friends studio time, a microphone, and a shot at being heard a generation later. (Numero Group, n.d.)

These labels present but a few examples of the twenty-first century, Internet-influenced rise of re-issue culture, a musical phenomenon involving the re-release of classic, canonical albums as well as the digging up and re-presentation of more obscure material, much of which was never released or underappreciated in its time (Reynolds, 2006, p. x). We exist in an exciting time when music enthusiasts are continuing to mine the rich and overlooked fields of twentieth century musical history from around the world for performances which hold meaning and significance in our modern quest for cross-cultural understanding and global sustainability. The possibilities are wide open as far as where experimental explorations can develop and expand local participant understandings and scene boundaries. But, all such articulations, experimentations, and increased understanding in performance can only happen over time, despite many challenges, and via increased interactions with diverse others.

Those who stay in Boone, despite the financial difficulty and slow pace, often do so because this remains a cosmopolitan enough place where one can earn enough to scrape by and continue doing what one loves to do. Despite its disadvantages, for many artists, living amidst the natural abundance and beauty of this place inspires creativity. As Christian also remarked earlier, this place possesses no shortage of radically like-minded, creative people. Speaking for Michael and myself, despite Boone's geographical isolation and the isolation people often feel between each other, we have felt more accepted and respected here than in any place we have been thus far. Additionally, this is a place in which we have begun to finally open up to deeper musical engagement and tap into our own vast reservoirs of creative potential.

In this place, I have learned more about doing and perseveringly continuing to do than I ever expected. Much of this thesis would have been impossible to write without all I have learned from listening to others talk about their everyday lives and passions. The kind of scene cooperation and

communion that so many desire will require much more learning how to listen to each other. In setting all this in words, exploring and recognizing the uncomfortable boundaries of competition alongside the triumphant moments of cooperation, I longed to unearth more complex connections and visions of our culture, our place, our time, and our selves. My sincere desire has been to show, rather than tell, and to create a unique forum in which we can all see and hear each other differently—hopefully, with a little more clarity, humility, and understanding.

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Biographical Information

Shannon Ann Basas Perry was born in Angeles City, Philippines on November, 5, 1985, and spent her early childhood years in her mother's native Philippines, Oklahoma, and Turkey. Growing up in the small, former fishing village of Niceville, Florida, in the state's northwestern panhandle, she moved to central Georgia in 2000, where she graduated from Houston County High School in 2003. Shannon attended the University of Georgia, in Athens, from 2003-2007, graduating magna cum laude with dual Bachelor's degrees in English and English Education.

After graduation she moved to Macon, Georgia where she worked as a tutor and rekindled a lifelong passion for playing and performing music. In the fall of 2009, inspired by the moving and urgent words of Wendell Berry, Shannon began graduate studies at Appalachian State University, first in the Sustainable Development track of the Appalachian Studies program. She gradually fell in love with sociocultural anthropology and promptly switched to the program's culture concentration. Since the summer of 2010, she has taught social science-focused Introduction to Appalachian Studies courses through ASU's Center for Appalachian Studies. Shannon's immediate future plans include taking a vacation, playing some music, and continuing to hone her teaching and writing skills in anticipation of applying to doctoral programs in anthropology.